

Pocket Series
No. 163.

BEADLE'S

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POCKET NOVELS

Hank, the Guide. 163



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HANK, THE GUIDE;

OR,

THE WRONG TRAIL.

BY HARRY HAZARD,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 38 THE HEART EATER. | 77 SCARLET SHOULDERS. |
| 43 THE WHITE OUTLAW. | 79 OUTLAW JACK. |
| 54 ARKANSAS JACK. | 88 THE INDIAN SCOUT. |
| 66 RATTLING DICK. | 109 THE SCALPED HUNTER. |
| 71 DELAWARE TOM. | 120 MAD TRAIL HUNTER. |
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HANK, THE GUIDE;

OR,

THE WRONG TRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAIN.

IT was near the close of an unusually hot summer day that our tale opens. The sun, glowing like a hot globe of fire, long since had passed the meridian, and was drawing nigh the western horizon. It was a common scene that it shone upon—common in those days, but now, since the advent of the mighty “iron horse,” one seldom to be met with.

A long, weather-beaten train of emigrant-wagons was toiling its weary way over the almost trackless prairie—a prairie that might almost be called desert, so dreary did the barren, sandy waste appear. Save here and there a clump of half-dried sage, with an occasional group of thorny mesquite, and far in the distance ahead, a long, low, dark line, that told of timber or underbrush bordering some stream, the eye could discern naught to relieve the painful monotony—nothing but sand. There were no mounds, nothing green and refreshing; no living object to be seen, save the slowly-creeping train.

Perhaps a hundred yards in advance rode a single horseman. From under the dusty brim of his slouched hat, a pair of piercing gray eyes darted quick, keen glances in every direction, as though their owner was ill at ease. As a slight gust of wind parts the cloud of dust that enveloped him, thus affording a fair view of both rider and steed, their forms are distinctly visible.

The guide—for such he undoubtedly is—has apparently seen fifty summers, for his long elf-locks of sandy hair are thickly threaded with gray. And these, together with the matted mass of grizzled whiskers and mustache, so conceal his

face, that little can be seen save the eyes, and a small, well-cut Roman nose. A pair of broad shoulders, massive chest tapering down to a round, compact waist, abruptly-swelling hips, muscular thighs slightly bowed by constant riding, the shapely calves terminating with large but neatly-turned and arched feet—all combined formed a model that would have compared favorably with that of the Farnese Hercules. This figure was clothed in a closely-fitting suit of softly-dressed deer-skin, evidently Indian-tanned, and gaudily ornamented, with true savage idea of beauty. The seams of the breeches and moccasins, as well as the coat or tunic, were deeply fringed with tags cut from the material forming the garments. A "pipe-holder"—evidently a *gage d'amour* from some dusky sweetheart—rested upon his breast. It was made of fawn-skin, gayly adorned with stained quills, feathers and bright beads, and suspended by a twisted thread of wampum. A broad belt of the latter material encircled his waist, suspending a heavy, broad-bladed knife and a brace of stout, serviceable, single-barreled pistols. Carelessly balanced across the pommel of his saddle, was a long rifle, very valuable if only for the silver ornaments upon its stock.

The steed he bestrode was a large, powerful chestnut-sorrel, a perfect model of equine beauty—one upon whom a man could stake his life without fear or thought of losing. The only marks about him were a small white "star" in his forehead, and his white feet—the latter giving him the name of "Silver Heels."

Well might Hank Triplett—Old Hank, the guide, as he was better known—be proud of his noble horse. Time and again had his life been preserved by its matchless speed and endurance, when relentless foes pressed hard upon his trail. They were friends—friends that nothing but death could long keep asunder. They had shared deprivations and dangers, pleasures and luxuries, had starved and feasted ; where one was, the other was only content when within sight. Their love for each other had passed into a proverb among the trappers and "mountain men," used whenever they wished to typify great love and fidelity.

The guide paused and gazed back toward the train.

This was composed of some forty wagons, covered by what

had once been white duck, but now was of a soiled, dirty color, produced by the numerous showers, combined with the dust and fine sand cast up on the air by the feet of the slowly-toiling oxen. To a novice the sight would have been interesting from its very newness; but to one compelled to live through it day after day, it is painfully depressing. The hard creaking of unground axles, the hoarse order, "W'o haw" or "Gee," oftentimes intermingled with enraged cursings; the shouts of those driving the loose stock, or occasional bellow of pain from some unusually refractory animal as it felt the sharp-cutting lash; the harsh, grinding tread—form a living picture that grows almost unbearable from its terrible sameness.

Leading the train some few yards was an army ambulance, drawn by a pair of stout mules, and driven by a young man dressed in a light-gray suit of half-civilian, half-hunter style. At its side rode an officer whose "shoulder-straps" denoted him a colonel in the regular army. On each side, but a little to the rear, rode half a dozen men, also belonging to the United States service.

Within the conveyance, upon a back seat, were two ladies, but whether young or otherwise could not be determined, a screen of fine gauze being extended before them for the purpose of excluding the annoying dust.

The officer now exchanged a few words with the females, and then spurred forward in reply to a signal made by the guide, who awaited his arrival, then they rode slowly along, side by side.

"Well, Triplett, what's the matter?" inquired the colonel.

"Nothin' much, as yit, but thar'll be a heap the matter ef ye camp in thet timmer yonder, as ye said," replied the guide.

"Still harping on the old strain," impatiently returned the officer. "I thought that question was settled the other time you mentioned it. Here we have been camping in the most outlandish places, where were neither grass nor water for the stock, and wood would often have to be carried half a mile—for safety sake, you say!"

"Better *that*, Kurnel Pinger, than to be massacred by the Injuns."

"Bah ! That's another of your hobbies. I don't believe there is an Indian for miles around. Besides, the ladies have been so closely confined to the ambulance that I promised them a treat to-night. I've been along here before, and it's a lovely place—"

"Yas, mighty purty fer a 'bushment," interrupted Hank.

"Look here, Mr. Triplett," excitedly answered Colonel Pinger, "do you or I command this train ? Had I known you were *afraid*—"

"Jest stop right whar ye air, Kurnel Pinger. We mought as well hev a settlement now as hyararter. You air the fust man thet ever called me a coward an'—"

"But, Hank, I—"

"Wait till I'm through, an' then ye kin talk jest as long as ye please. A man never spoke twic't to me as you hev, an' lived to tell on it. I know ye command this train, but ye don't *me*, not by a long chalk. Ef I'm to guide ye to the fort, ye hev got to do as I say. Ef ye *won't*, then the sooner we part the better we'll feel, both on us. Fer the las' two days, Injun sign hev bin as thick as fleas on a yaller-belly, an' they're on'y a-holdin' off until they git a good chaine, then they'll kum down on us hot an' heavy. Jest as shore as ye camp thar, ye'll smell brimstone afore ye're a day older, or my name hain't Hank Triplett, now I tell ye ! Ef 'twa'n't fer the wimmen-folk, durned ef I'd say a word, but let ye do as ye pleased. P'r'aps ye'd l'arn a little sense then," added Triplett, in a muttered tone.

"Don't fly off the handle, Triplett. I didn't mean all I said, and beg your pardon if I hurt your feelings," replied Pinger, who was a right-hearted, if rather a hasty and opinionated man.

"All right, then ; hyar's my han'," rejoined the mollified guide, "but still I say 'twon't do to camp thar. Shore as ye do, the reds 'll take us. Away from kiver, with the wagins corraled, we're safe."

Colonel Pinger was about to make a hasty reply, but in the heat of their dispute they had unconsciously halted, and at this moment the ambulance drove up to their side. A bewitching little head appeared at the displaced curtain, and its owner queried, anxiously :

"What's the matter, papa? Any trouble?"

"No, no trouble exactly, but a great bother. Here's Triplett says we must not camp in the woods yonder, but stop again on the open prairie for fear of Indians."

"But, Mr. Triplett, you surely don't think there is any danger, do you? I do so want to stop at the Ford that papa talks so much about, and if you don't consent I shall feel eally hurt!" pouted pretty Josie Pinger, with a grace that she knew from experience the old scout could not resist.

"Wal, miss, it's hard to say no to such purty lips as them o' your'n, but I raally don't think it's safe. The reds air roun', 'ca'se I've seen lots o' sign, an' know they mean mischief, else we'd 'a' hed a call afore now. I've bin 'mong 'em, man an' boy, nigh onto forty yearn, an' orter know a few about 'em," replied Hank, doffing his slouch hat with a rude bow, while his eyes glistened with admiration at the beaming face before him.

"Now really, Mr. Hank, if you don't please me in this, I'll never speak a word to you if I live a hundred years!" declared Josie, in a tone of much anger.

"Yes, my dear Mr. Tripple," squeaked a thin, crab-apple voice, as a face suddenly appeared by the side of the young girl—a face that corresponded perfectly with the tone, "for *our* sakes, *do* say yes!" and the speaker cast a would-be fascinating glance upon the stalwart guide.

"Two on one, an' them ladies, is too much fer one man, an' I guess I'll hev to gin in," replied Hank, with a comical expression of dismay upon his face as he caught the glance cast by the latter. "Yas, I knock under, though I know it's wrong, an' hope to gracious nothin' bad 'll kum of it. But, 'member, I washes my han's o' the hull job, an' ef ye all git butchered an' skulped, don't blame me!" he added, in a tone of misgiving.

"Never fear," laughed Josie, gleefully; "in that case, I guess we will all have something else to think about; so don't worry, that's a dear, good old fellow," throwing a kiss to the delighted guide, who then turned and galloped on after the colonel, who had confidently left the task of bringing the obstinate Hank to terms, to his daughter, who, he knew, could do pretty much as she pleased with him.

It was nearly dark when the wagon-train reached the grove of trees, and a few more minutes found them gathered upon the bank of a small stream, busily engaged in the process of encamping. Under the supervision of Triplett a strong corral was formed of a circular shape, by placing the wagons end to end, an outer row being placed so as to cover the joints. Meantime, camp-fires had been built, the children being employed in gathering fuel while the women were preparing for the evening meal. The cattle and horses were securely hopped, to prevent their straying to any distance, and then turned loose to feed at will upon the rich, succulent grass that bordered the creek. A little to one side of the general group, near a small fire, apparently watching the bustling form of Mrs. Mawson, the sergeant's wife, as she cooked their supper, were seated our heroine, Josie Pinger, and her maiden aunt, Miss Medora Pinger. Apparently, we say, for in reality the eyes of the latter were covertly following the motions of the guide.

In fact, we may as well confess it first as last, the antiquated spinster was deeply smitten with the tall form and noble physique of the grizzled borderer, and showed no false modesty in revealing to him the state of her affections; oftentimes, in fact, verging upon the opposite extreme, much to his consternation.

Josie's eyes often wandered toward the ambulance where the driver was busied in attending to the span of mules. In good sooth it was a pleasing form for a young maiden's eyes to rest upon. Not tall, but about the medium height, his form evidenced grace, strength and activity. The broad *sombrero* was now pushed away from his brow, that shone clear and white in the bright moonlight. The rest of the face was tanned to a deep, ruddy brown. The features were regular—almost faultlessly so. A short, silky beard and mustache shaded the lips and chin, but a pleasant half-smile occasionally disclosed a set of small, even teeth, gleaming white, despite the use of a meerscham pipe that was his constant companion when absent from the presence of the ladies. His hair was short and curly, a hazel-brown like the beard and eyes. The latter large, bright and laughing, with a roguishness in their glance that flatly contradicted the modest, almost bashful words and demeanor while in the presence of the ladies.

A neat suit of gray, half-civilian, half-hunter clothes, completed the picture.

Basil Croteau had joined the train at Independence, Missouri, a once far-famed outfitting point, (now a little "one-horse town, although the county-seat,) as teamster, but the colonel taking a fancy to him, appointed him driver of the ambulance, the conveyance of his sister and daughter—a change that apparently pleased all parties concerned.

While filling this post, Basil proved himself a pleasing, intelligent companion, as the ladies soon grew to consider him, yet one that never presumed or tried to overstep the line drawn between his employer's daughter and himself. At first Josie held herself haughtily shy, but as she noted the calmly respectful demeanor of the handsome driver, who always treated her deferentially yet did not appear to be smitten with her charms, she grew piqued and treated him with far more complaisance than she otherwise would. At length she found herself thinking far more about the apparently stony-hearted youth than she would care to acknowledge, even to herself.

By this time Basil had finished his task, and filling his pipe, lazily reclined against the trunk of a tree some distance from the ladies. A casual observer would have pronounced him dozing, and so thought provoked Josie Pinger, who watched him far more intently than she otherwise would have done. But from under the brim of his slouched hat, those large dark eyes were eagerly devouring the bewitching features of the little sprite he loved so dearly.

And this is what he saw.

A *petite* form, yet not too slight, with proportions so perfect the most fastidious could not fault it. Her features, taken separately, would not be considered perfect, by any means. The forehead was a thought too low, the nose slightly *retroussé*, while around its base could be seen a few, *very* few, tiny brown freckles. The mouth was small, with slightly pouting, ruby lips, that, smiling, revealed the twin rows of pearls imprisoned within, surmounting a cunning, dimpled chin. Her eyes were large, brilliant, of a deep purplish black, at times melting, so soft and tender, only the moment after to shine and sparkle like fire-flies at night. Her hair, black as midnight, was short, and curling around her head with a grace that was bewitch-

ing in itself. This, with a voice of wonderful capacity and sweetness, completed the inventory. Dear reader, have you any idea of her appearance, as she sat in the full glow of the firelight? I fear not, yet it must suffice.

Supper was now announced, and the groups speedily mingled together, appeasing the hunger occasioned by their long, weary ride.

CHAPTER II.

THEY COME!

SUPPER over, the guide drew Colonel Pinger aside from the ladies, and they conversed for a short time in low, guarded tones. Then the latter having yielded to the arguments brought forward by Hank, the guide collected the men forming the company, and announced the probability of an attack by the Indians, giving his reasons for thinking so. Then he told them his plan for the defense of the camp, and advised the women and children to stay close to the wagons, where a comparatively safe refuge could be found, unless the camp was carried by storm. A half-score trusty men were selected and stationed at regular intervals around the encampment, within the somewhat dense underwood. These he strictly cautioned to be watchful, not to allow a living object larger than a squirrel to pass their posts without a close inspection. Their rifles were not to be discharged without good cause, and upon the report they were all to retreat to the corral, there to meet the onslaught as best they might. The fires were to be extinguished, and upon no account were they to make any unusually loud noise or show a light for any purpose. Meanwhile he would scout around and try to discover their enemies, should the case be as expected. Should they hear his rifle they were to retreat to the wagons, and he would announce his coming by three sharp whistles, giving them an example so that there would be no fear of a mistake.

Drawing his belt tighter around his waist old Hank strode away with long but silent strides. There was a look of con-

cern upon his face, and a feeling of foreboding at his heart that he could not banish. Like the generality of his class, who often passed months in solitude, Triplett had formed the habit of talking to himself, if talking it could be called when the sounds could scarcely be heard a yard from his lips. It was a habit of which he was probably unconscious himself. After perhaps an hour had been spent in scouting around the edge of the timber, without any thing unusual occurring, he muttered :

"Wal, all the fools ain't dead yit, *thet's* sartin. An' ef anybody says thet old Hank Triplett was one o' them, I don't believe he'd tell a very big lie, though he *mought* git a mouthful of loose teeth, like I know'd a feller to, onc't, fer sayin' so," added he, chuckling inaudibly as some reminiscence passed through his mind that pleased his fancy.

"To think thet I, an' ole mountain man, shed knock under to that pig-headed kurnel, an' camp whar a greenhorn on his fust trip would steer cl'ar of! But who could say no to thet Miss Josie? Lord bless her purty eyes! She's an angel ef they ever grow down hyar, 'thout the wings. Wal, I on'y hope as how she'll see the sun rise ag'in, all safe an' sound, though 'twon't be *his* fault ef she does. But one thin's sartin, ef any thin' bad comes to the leetle birdy, them as does it'll hev to pay big fer it, now I tell ye!

"Howsomever, I hope it's all right. 'Twould be almighty rough on me, ef the train shed git wiped out, arter gittin' along safe so fer, an' all through that cussed fool, the kurnel. Thar ain't never nothin' o' the kind happened to me yit, an' I've piloted gobs of 'em over. Wal, we'll see afore long, any how," and his mutterings gradually died away.

Perhaps four hours had elapsed since his leaving the camp, and nothing unusual had occurred, although he did not relax his vigilance. He knew the habits of the Indians too well, not to feel assured that the attack, if any, would be made in the small hours, after midnight, when the emigrants would be supposed to be in their soundest slumber. Several times he had encircled the camp, and using great caution saw that the sentinels were on the alert. At length, after a circuit, he seated himself upon a fallen log close to a clump of bushes, so that the moonlight might not betray him should any enemy

chance that way. He did not know for certain that **such** were nigh, but it was his policy to ever act as though they were, and to this fact he mainly owed his long immunity and high reputation as a successful scout and guide.

Time rolled on and he was again thinking of repeating his tour of inspection, when a slight rustle met his ear—so slight that it would not have attracted the attention of an ear less keen than that of the guide, or else would have been attributed to the breeze. But, Hank knew better; he knew it was the tread of a moccasined foot, upon the carpet of last year's leaves. With head and neck craned forward, listening intently, with one hand clasping the horn-haft of his knife, he awaited the result. Not long, however; for the next moment a dusky form appeared in view, crouched and gliding like a panther across the narrow strip of moonlight. Then he knew that his fears were to be realized: that they were discovered, and their bloodthirsty foes were upon them. Still he moved not, only clenched his knife with a firmer hold and noiselessly rested his rifle against the log. The savage paused and peered keenly through the gloom. All was silent. The moon was hidden behind the bushy limbs of an oak tree, and all below was darkness. Then he slowly moved on directly toward the hidden scout, who saw that a collision was inevitable.

Again he paused, close by the clump of bushes, and mechanically outstretched his hand to grasp them. It was done without thought, but it proved an unlucky movement for him. As he stood, not a yard separated him from Hank, and with his left arm extended, his side was fully exposed, his form showing clear and distinct against the sky, almost over the scout. Triplett did not throw away his chance, but, with a fierce lunge, buried his long blade to the hilt in the Indian's heart, at the same time clutching his throat with a grip of iron. A slight gurgle was all, then with a convulsive shudder the red-man's limbs straightened in the embrace of death, while his spirit winged its way to the happy hunting-grounds of his people. Cautiously lowering the body to the ground, the scout adroitly stripped off the scalp, holding it so the moonbeams fell upon it. Then, as he noted the fashion of **the scalp-lock**, he muttered:

"Blackfoot brave, by th' Eternal! The devil's to pay now, an' as pitch hot. Thet thar's one the less on 'em anyhow, and thet—hello! what's thet?"

The latter exclamation was caused by the ominous click of a rifle meeting his ear. When examining the scalp he had unconsciously stepped out into the moonlight. Quick as thought Hank leaped to one side, grasping his rifle, where the shade would screen his motions, at the same time cocking his weapon. As he did so a sharp report was heard, a bright flash spouted out, and a bullet hissed past his cheek, creasing it and severing a lock of his grizzly whiskers in its passage. Instantly his rifle was discharged at the flash, followed by a shrill screech of death-agony, then all was still. The guide did not pause, but rapidly glided along through the bushes to toward the nearest picket.

Basil Croteau was one of the number selected to guard against surprise from the enemy, and was posted upon a slight eminence that afforded a fair view of the camp as well as surrounding woods. The knoll was free from underbrush, while a spreading tree cast it partially in the shade. He stood leaning against the trunk, with his thoughts dwelling far more upon the graces of fair Josie Pinger, than their present danger, if the truth must be confessed. Time passed rapidly with him, and the hours rolled on unheeded, save now and then, when, with an effort, he would rouse his wandering thoughts and keenly scrutinize the surrounding objects. It was in one of these fits of abstraction that he now stood, with gaze vacantly fixed upon a dark object lying upon the ground, perhaps a score yards distant from the tree. This was about the size of a man, but it did not appear to move, neither could any limbs be seen. It was lying in the shade, but the moonlight began a few feet before it, that is, toward Basil.

The fact was, the object was alive, and neither more nor less than a Blackfoot brave. That he knew of Croteau's presence was evident from his actions. The way he discovered him was this: Basil was an inveterate smoker, and while musing, all unconscious of what he was doing, he filled his pipe, struck a match, and igniting it puffed away vehemently. The Indian was in advance of his comrades, acting as scout, and the light breeze wafted the fragrant vapor to his nostrils. Liter-

ally following up the scent, he at length caught sight of the slight spark that shone from the pipe-bowl faintly through the ashes, looking like a glow-worm. That it was not that insect was plain, from its remaining stationary, but the gloom was so intense that the form of the smoker could not be discerned. To be sure, a bullet or arrow might be fired with tolerable certainty a few inches above or below the spark, but that would not answer. The shot must be instantly fatal, and with an arrow, else the encampment would be alarmed and their object foiled. The strip of moonlight was narrow—scarcely a couple of yards in width ; could he cross that safely success appeared easy.

At length Croteau gave a slight start. It appeared to him that the dark, log-like object had moved nearer toward him—that the line of light was nearer its closest end, but he was not certain. Perhaps the moon—but no, the change of her position would *increase* the distance, not lessen it. His suspicion was now fully aroused, and then he noted the folly he had been guilty of. With a mental imprecation he placed his wetted finger upon the spark, and extinguished it. Then he turned his attention to the object of his suspicion. It was motionless and upon the same spot, he having noted the sudden disappearance of the fire, and fearing discovery, lay like a log. Basil began to think he had been alarmed without cause, still he was not entirely satisfied. Yet he did not like to discharge his rifle, and perhaps alarm the camp needlessly. So, to solve his doubts, he drew his knife, and taking the point between thumb and finger, cast it with all his force and skill at the dark object.

Simultaneously with its leaving his hand, the rifle that had been fired at the scout rung upon the still air, quickly followed by another, and this by a wild yell. At the report the Black-foot leaped forward, at the same time discharging the arrow already fitted to the bow, thus avoiding the heavy knife. The arrow struck Basil, but did not inflict a fatal wound or prevent him from returning the compliment by a rifle-ball through the body of the red-man, who fell with the war-whoop of his tribe issuing from his lips. It was taken up by and echoed from every point of the compass, until the woods appeared full of demons, and the enemy darted forward, thirsting for the blood of the whites.

But the latter were ready for them, owing to the precautions of Triplett, and gave them a warm reception. The pickets all succeeded in entering the corral safely, and when the first volley was fired, old Hank gave his signal, and tearing away the brush that was piled under one of the wagons, he stood in their midst, after carefully replacing the rubbish that he had moved. This would form a partial shield against bullets and other missiles, besides giving warning should the Indians endeavor to enter in that way. Being green, it would be nearly impossible for it to be fired, and could not be removed without considerable noise.

The first volley was deadly, and the savages staggered for a moment. Fortunately some of the more experienced emigrants had saved their fire, and these, together with what pistols were in the party, completed the repulse, for the Indians had by no means anticipated such a warm reception, and tacitly beat a retreat, followed by a defiant cheer from the elated white men.

"Thet's right, boys; give the red devils greased lightnin'!" shouted Triplett, rapidly discharging his rifle and pistols, that did good service. "But look a-hyar, fer the Lord's sake don't all fire ag'in to onc't; ef ye do, we're gone up fer sure. They'll stick longer next time, an' do thar darndest, an' we'll hev our han's full. String out shoulder to shoulder so's to watch all p'int's, an' when they make a rush, let every other man fire; then load while t'others do the same, an' be sure, jist as soon as ye fire, to drop down, or dodge to one side, or they'll plump ye when they shoot at the blaze. Mind now. Look out, hyar they come!" at the same time coolly picking off one of the leaders, who dropped in his tracks.

This seemed to be a signal for a general volley from the assailants, but which did little harm to the well-protected emigrants. One man, however, was struck by an arrow in the throat, checking in its birth the defiant cheer he tried to utter. Several others were hurt, but luckily none so severely as to prevent their doing their duty. The whites saw their comrade's death, as he staggered out from the barricade and fell in a bright spot, and a momentary chill crept over them at the thought that this might be the end that awaited them all. But this they soon banished, and a wild, hoarse yell of vengeance

went up as with one accord, and they fought better and with more fierceness as they thought of their comrade and his young wife, who doubtless at that moment was fervently offering up agonizing prayers for his safety—that her husband, the father of her helpless babe, might pass unscathed through the dangers of that terrible struggle.

The Blackfeet were not checked by their deadly fire, however, and the barricade was reached, and for a time it seemed as though their effort to carry it would prove successful. They were met stoutly, and the sabers and bayonets of the soldiers proved invaluable. As the dusky fiends strove to scale the barricade of wagons, they were met with pistol-shots and clubbed-rifles, and, when possible, knife-thrusts. Did they strive to penetrate or remove the brushwood that choked up the space beneath the wagons, the noise would betray them, and a saber-thrust, or the sharp point of a bayonet, wielded by strong and willing hands, would repel them, or cause the death-yell to mingle with the confused medley of sounds that converted the little glade into a living Pandemonium.

Truly it was a horrible scene, one that a participant could never forget or erase from his memory. To see the furious onslaught, the deadly repulse; to hear the crackings of pistols and rifles; the louder detonations of carbines; the deadly whistling of bullets and hurtling arrows; the clash of steel; the wild yells of one, the hoarse shoutings of the other; the shrill screams of women, as a deadly missile passed near their covert, or the shrieking of a terrified child; to hear the blood-curdling war-whoop; the stifled cry or imprecation as a foeman's weapon pierced the sensitive flesh, with now and then a dull thud, that once heard can never be associated with any other cause, as some human form falls dead to its mother earth; to hear the moans and cries of the mortally wounded, as they writhe upon the ground; the stentorian orders of the leaders; the yells of baffled hate, and tramp of the retiring foe; and then the glorious sound of the cheer of victory that swelled up from the throats of those brave men, as the last foe disappeared, carrying joy once more to the hearts of those tender ones, not unmingled with anguish as the ever-present thoughts of their dear ones' danger, perchance death, again pressed upon them with renewed force. It was a scene that no pencil could por-

tray, that no pen might describe; to fully comprehend it in all its terrible grandeur, one must witness it—mingle with the actors of the bloody, terrific drama.

“Load up, boys, ’tain’t over yit by a long chalk! Thar’s more to come an’ ’tain’t no manner o’ use to waste breath thet ye’ll need yit, a-hollerin’ afore ye git outen the wuds,” ordered Triplett, who seemed to be universally acknowledged a leader by even the colonel, to whom Indian-fighting was comparatively new business.

Yet he won his spurs nobly, and ever where danger was thickest he fully maintained his reputation as a brave and gallant soldier. Basil Croteau also particularly distinguished himself—although the wound received from the spy troubled him somewhat—if that could be said where all were so brave.

Old Hank appeared to bear a charmed life, for throughout all that long conflict not a weapon had touched his bones, although his garments were slashed and pierced in a score of places. He now drew Colonel Pinger to one side and said:

“Wal, kurnel, ye see thar war an Injun ’ithin miles o’ us, an’ a good wheen o’ the red devils at thet, don’t ye?”

“You were right and I wrong, and I ask your pardon for the hard words I spoke,” frankly extending his hand, that was heartily grasped by the brawny palm of the guide. “I don’t know what we’d have done if I’d had my own way altogether.”

“None o’ thet, kurnel; I’ve lived ’mong ’em longer ’n you hev, an’ orter know thar ways better. But what’s the matter? Hain’t hurt be ye?” he added, in an anxious tone, as the colonel pressed his hand to his side and withdrew it covered with blood.

“Only a scratch, I believe, but it smarts confoundedly,” replied the other.

“Oh, then it’s all hunky; bad ones don’t sting. But ye go an’ see ef the wimmin-folks be safe, while I look to the men. Hurry back, fer thar’s more work to do, an’ we’ll need every arm,” and he hurried off to prepare for another attack if it should come.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNANSWERED CALL.

CALLING Basil Croteau, Triplett inspected the corral, partially to ascertain whether all was prepared for defense, as well as to learn what had been their loss in killed and wounded. The mortality had been comparatively slight, considering the fierceness of the fray, but the disabling of each man left their situation more precarious, for as he had said, every man would be needed. He found that there were fifty-three men all told, who were fit for duty, although the majority were wounded more or less severely. But in a case like this, when they were fighting for their own lives as well as those most dear to them, together with their little all, hurts that in less momentous cases would totally incapacitate them, were ignored or made light of.

"Wal," exclaimed Hank, as he completed his tour, "'tain't so bad as it mought be, though wusser'n I wish 'twar. Seven men killed, an' four purty nigh played out ! But thet cain't be helped, an' we hain't got no time to cry over 'em now. Pucker up, boys, an' let's giv' the red imps a cheer, jest to let 'em know we're ready fer 'em, ef they want to try it on ag'in," and a wild hurrah went up from those sturdy lungs, that made the echoes ring for miles around.

"Now, you fellers kin take turns an' go an' see your wimmin-folks fer a minnit. You go fust, Cook, but don't be long, fer thar's work yit, an' gobs of it. Only one at a time, 'member, from right to left. An' keep your eyes skinned fer the reds. Ef ye see an inch o' red hide, put a bullit through it, but be keerful not to miss, an' dodge like blazes, less ye'll git plugged back ag'in."

For some time all was silent, save the wind whispering through the tree-tops, the shrill cries of some summer insect, the gentle murmur of the stream, or now and then a low, guarded query from one of the besieged, as he spoke to his comrade, or a wail of some frightened infant. A few "green-

horns" began to believe that the enemy had fled, and were greatly elated thereat, but not so others. They knew from the energy the foe had already shown—a persistency that surprised all, none more so than the guide—that they were only repulsed, not defeated, and that their ominous silence boded them no good. That mischief was being planned they were assured, and awaited in awful suspense for its development. Any thing was better than this anxiety.

The guide and Croteau were standing side by side where they could obtain a fair view of the ground in front of them. The latter spoke first.

"What do you think of their silence, Hank?" he queried, in a low tone.

"Don't like it; 'tain't fer no good, ye kin bet high. I wish they'd come ag'in. Ef they do, an' we beat 'em back, thet'll finish it, fer it's mornin' now. Whatever they do, 'll be purty soon. They hain't got much time an' 'll do thar darnedest. It beats me," he added, after a slight pause, "the way those devils do fight! I hain't see'd nothin' like it sence I've bin on the plains. Thar's somethin' extr'or'nary in the wind now, ye mark my words. They're fightin' fer somethin' more'n kimmon, 'sif fer some perticklar thing, an' it beats me what it can be."

"I've noticed it too, and it struck me—but no, that can't be," mused Basil, half hesitatingly.

"Why, what's the matter? Spit it out!"

"May be you'll laugh, but sometimes I half believe it's so, and then it seems too ridiculous," replied Basil, half to himself.

"Tell it," laconically quoth the guide.

"Well, when we were camped on the 'Smoky,' you know, where we laid over Sunday, a chief, as he said he was, came into camp and stayed nearly all day. Of course he saw Josie—Miss Pinger I mean," blushing, which did not escape the watchful eye of the guide, "and was very much struck with her. Before he left he had the impudence to ask Colonel Pinger to give her to him, for a squaw, offering his horse in exchange."

"The dirty skunk!" muttered Hank, twisting off another quid of tobacco. "Go on."

"Well, of course he refused, and then the copper-colored rascal increased his offer until Colonel Pinger got mad, and ordered him out of the camp before he got worse treatment. The Indian swore he would have her anyhow, and then the colonel kicked him clear beyond the lises."

"Sarved the imp right, but 'twas mighty foolish on his part—the kurnel I mean. Did ye notice the shape of his scalp-lock or cut of his moccasins?"

"No, I didn't think of it."

"I warrant ye! But war thar any thin' that ye *did* notice?"

"Yes, now I think of it; he had a long half-circle around his head, as if made by a knife, and had lost the two smallest fingers from his left hand," replied Basil, after a moment's thought.

"The devil ye say!" exclaimed Hank, with a long, low whistle. "Them's my marks, an' he's ole "Three Fingers," the big war-chief of the Blackfeet. *Don't* I know him! Wagh! One of the toughest scrimmages I ever had war with him, an' I'd lifted his ha'r in a jiffy, but others come up an' I had to skedaddle mighty lively, now I tell ye. Thunder, ef it's him is arter us, an' I'm purty sartin 'tis, fer he's great on white squaws, the or'nary cuss, we'll hev our hands full, *you* bet. Whar war I when it happined, an' why on airth didn't I hear on it afore?"

"You were out hunting, I believe, and I suppose they didn't think it of enough importance to mention it," the young man replied.

"Importance be hanged!" bitterly exclaimed the guide. "Ef I'd on'y 'a' knowed it, this wouldn't 'a' happined. But 'tain't no use to worry 'bout it now. It's did, an'— Hello, whar'd thet come from?" he yelled, clapping one hand to his cheek.

The cause was plain; for a sharp, whip-like report was heard, and the bullet had crossed his face, inflicting a slight wound, and being a closer rub than the wrathful guide relished. The gloom prevented the smoke from being seen, and all they could do was to patiently wait, as best they might, for the repetition of the shot. It came in due time and with fatal effect, for a man upon the opposite side of the corral threw up his arms with a scream of agony, and fell, shot through the

brain. A wild chorus of yells went up from the Indians when they learned the success of the shot from the cry.

"Thar he is!" cried Triplett, pointing up at a tall, towering tree that completely overlooked the corral. "Thunder, thar's two on 'em. Jeeminy criminy, this must be stopped!" he added, as another flash was seen and a bullet hissed by his ears in close proximity to them.

"Bill Stevens, come hyar," ordered the guide.

But now another danger assailed them. A shower of enormous fire-flies arose from the woods on the side Hank was stationed, and describing a beautiful parabola rained upon the canvas covering of the wagons. They were arrows tipped with some inflammable material, probably soaked in whisky. Their object was not to burn the wagons, for that was impossible with such slight means, but to illuminate the interior of the corral, and if possible throw the defenders into confusion. This emergency was promptly met by Hank, who called a dozen men and ordered:

"Into the wagins, boys, an' cut the ties on t'other side. Be keerful, fer yer lives, don't let 'em see ye!"

The covers of several were in a blaze, and a series of shrieks arose from the terrified females, who were generally concealed within the inner circle, as they saw the fire blazing up over their heads. The fastenings were promptly severed on the outside, then the covers were pulled over and trampled under foot by those within. They were not unscathed while so doing, for as the bright light revealed their forms, with the distinctness of noonday, the savage marksmen stationed in the tree-tops improved their opportunity, and two of the besieged bit the dust. It only occupied a minute's time, and but the two shots were fired by them, but those who were beneath kept up a constant fusilade, steadily answered by the whites still on post. Hank now turned his attention to those who had already done so much damage. He leveled his rifle, then turning his head he spoke:

"Sight along the bar'l, boys; it's thar one of 'em is hid. Now, Basil, you fire at the spot, an' then when he answers it, I'll pop at the blaze. We kin git him that way. Stevens, you watch fer the other one. You're good at the flash."

Basil did as requested, and they could hear the rattle of

the bark shattered by his shot. The tree, near the top, made an abrupt curve, where the limbs were interweaved and twined together, thus forming a dense screen within which one of the Blackfeet had stationed himself. The other was a few feet lower, upon a huge limb that had a somewhat smaller one growing almost straight upward. Behind this, he was, as he imagined, perfectly secure.

The first savage now fired, and was instantly replied to by the guide. A wild cry followed. The scout's aim had been true, and his bullet had shattered the red-skin's jaw. The shock, or pain of the wound made him lose his balance, and after a vain effort to retain his perch, he fell. Not far though, for his outstretched hands grasping at every limb, clutched the ankle of his comrade below, to which he clung with the energy of despair. The shock was so sudden and unexpected to the latter, that he was partially dragged from his resting-place, and only saved himself by dropping his rifle and clutching the upright limb with both hands. As if by common consent both parties of combatants suspended hostilities, and awaited the result in breathless suspense. The uninjured Indian kicked vigorously with his free leg at the one incumbering him, but then the latter secured that also, making energetic efforts to raise himself to a foothold. There were no limbs within his reach, however, and it is doubtful how the affair would have ended, but Stevens' rifle spoke, and with a wild death-yell, both savages were dashed to the ground. A hearty cheer was uttered by the whites as they beheld the death of these dangerous enemies; a chorus of horrible yells from the Blackfeet, and as one man, they bounded from their covert and dashed to the assault. The crisis had come. Their foes were making their last furious onslaught, and were this repelled, the train was saved, at least for that night. But would it be? None could say with certainty, and the besieged fought as only men can, who are battling for all that is dear and precious upon earth to them.

The greatest apparent confusion reigned, but there was order in it all. The hoarse commands of Colonel Pinger, the sharp, quick directions of the guide, the encouragement of Basil, added to their brave, almost reckless daring, inspired the men with fresh energy, and they fought like demons. De-

fiant shouts answered the shrill war-whoop, shot were returned for bullets and arrows, while the soldiers' cold steel was not idle. Twice had the Blackfeet effected an entrance, twice were they met hand to hand and driven back, with fearful loss. The bodies of dead and wounded strewed the ground, the white man side by side with that of his red foe, perchance still locked in the fatal embrace, or lying where death overtook them. Still the combat raged. Then the reports ceased, save now and then an occasional one from those too badly wounded to join hand to hand. The saber, bayonet or clubbed rifle met the knife-thrust, the tomahawk and spear. The warriors' quivers had been emptied and the bows cast aside as useless. Oh, it was a terrible sight!

The dusky fiends clambered over the barricade only to be stricken down by some strong arm fired with hate and deadly vengeance. They crawled under the wagons, through the brushwood, only to meet the same fate, or more successfully to grapple with their foes, when the struggle ended with the death of one, perchance both.

It was a terrible—horrible scene, and the heart grows chill at the very thought of it, though years have rolled around the cycle of time, and most of the actors in that dread drama of life and death have gone to their last long home.

The moon still shone upon the picture—a veritable one, dear reader; the wind murmured, the insects did not cease their song, still the conflict raged with unabated ferocity.

As if by magic, the Blackfeet swarm over the barricade, and now the struggle becomes the life-and-death grapple. Friend and foe are mixed in one horrible *melée*—oaths, shouts, yells and curses fill the air, while the crash and thud of blows are heard, and the steel glimmers a deep crimson in the bright moonlight as it drips with life-blood. The struggle was short but eventful, brief but deadly, and then the red-men are slowly being driven back. A loud crash, the wild, piercing shriek of a woman's voice is heard; then a long-drawn, quivering cry, and with one more blow, the Indians retreat, and in an instant's time all have vanished save those who heard not the cry, who would never more tread the war-path—and those too severely wounded to flee. The victory was with the white men, but ah, at what a fearful cost!

All eyes are turned in the direction from whence the crash and shriek had resounded. The cause of the former was plain—the latter easily conjectured. The ambulance had been stationed at a point where the shadow cast by the overhanging trees was unusually dense, and so situated that the change in the moon's position would not affect the shade. Save that it was close to the barricade it was in a comparatively safe situation and out of harm's way, unless from some random missile. Within this the colonel's sister and daughter had sought refuge.

Now the ambulance was lying upon its side, with the end and one side curtain torn or slashed asunder. By its overthrow the vehicle was cast into the clear moonlight. The interior was visible. But its occupants, where were they?

With a wild cry of anguish, Colonel Pinger darted forward, his worst fears roused. Swift as were his footsteps, two forms sprung past him and reached the carriage first. They were those of the guide and Basil Croteau.

"Josie, my daughter, where are you? My God, child, speak to me! 'Tis your father calls!"

"'Tain't no use, boss; she's gone. Them villains hev got her. Foller me, young feller, p'r'aps we can cotch 'em afore they git c'lar off," hurriedly spoke the guide, as he clambered over the barricade, closely followed by Basil.

The colonel tried to follow, but he sunk down fainting from weakness caused by loss of blood and fatigue, added to the shock of his daughter's loss. The two men darted rapidly through the timber, without taking any precautions for silence. They did not think of that, nor fear discovery. They were excited—nearly wild—for Josie Pinger was dearer to the hearts of both than any other living object. On they rushed, without much hope of effecting a rescue—rushed on because they could not remain idle while there was a chance, however faint, of doing her a service. Their only chance was to overtake her captors before they reached their horses, and then make a fierce dash for it, depending upon the suddenness, and the hope that the foe would think the whole force of emigrants were upon them, and thus be enabled to release her and escape during the confusion.

They passed through the woods, and reached the open

prairie. Hank stooped and bent his ear to the ground. He caught the sound of rushing and trampling of feet toward the north-west—up the creek—and again darted forward with the velocity of a race-horse.

A couple of sharp reports—the flash of two rifles and the sharp whiz of the bullets as they hurtled past them, was heard; then a brace of dusky warriors left the woods and bounded forward to intercept the white men. The latter did not pause, but, as if by clockwork, their deadly rifles rose their cheeks, and then those long dark tubes vomited forth their contents, and one of the red-skins fell to rise no more. Basil had missed. The surviving Blackfoot turned to flee. But a foe was upon his trail who was unequaled in speed, despite his age—a foe who boasted, and truly, that the man did not live who could in a fair race show him the color of his back—who could leave him to run in the dust. A few score leaps, then the heavy knife of the guide whizzed through the air, and, true to its mark, buried itself to the hilt between the broad, muscular shoulders of the fleeing savage. Stricken even unto death, he threw up his arms, and, with a horrible death-shriek, tottered forward, falling upon his face, dead. Hank stooped as he passed and made an ineffectual grasp at the haft, but failing, sped on. He dared not pause, but speedily reloaded his rifle, even as he ran.

It all passed almost with the quickness of thought. Scarce a score of seconds elapsed from the ambushed shots, until all was over.

Still they sped onward. The noise made by their enemies grows louder and more distinct upon their ears, and hope is renewed within their breasts. But this was soon dissipated. They were skirting the timber. A horde of mounted savages burst into view around a slight bend, spurring as though fearing pursuit, toward the north. In their lead gleams the light drapery of two females. They ride not alone; a pair of dusky arms encircles the waist of each. With a hoarse cry of mingled rage and despair, Triplett pauses, and leveling his rifle until it bears full upon the form of one of the captors, his gray eye glances through the sights, and with the crack, its mark reels and falls, the female with him, while the riderless steed gallops wildly over the plain. She is in great

danger from the trampling hoofs, but a savage bends over, a muscular arm grasps hers, and her light form is drawn up and seated upon a second horse. A wild cry of rage, mingled with shrieks for help from the captives—then a score of Blackfeet turn and ride back to chastise the daring men. Basil heeds them not, he heeds nothing but the terror-stricken sounds of that loved one's voice, and is dashing on to certain destruction, when a grasp that he can not resist is laid upon his shoulder, and he is forced back to the covert of the friendly trees. The red-men do not follow them—they dare not, for they know not what those shadows conceal, and have this night been taught to respect the heavy arms of their pale-faced foes.

"Let me go, Triplett, let up, I say! Didn't you hear her call me?" he raged, as he vainly strove to free himself.

"Fool! hev ye more nor one skulp thet ye can afford to throw away the one ye w'ar in thet shape?" rejoined Hank. "Don't ye see thet it's no use? They're on hosses an' we afoot. We'd be wiped out afore ten minutes. No, no, boy, we must work a leetle different from *thet*, ef we ever expect to capter her back ag'in. An' git her I will, ef I hev of to spend all my life, an' wipe out every mother's son of 'em. It Hank Triplett says it, an' it's sw'ar'd to. Mind thet, youngster, an' he don't go back on his word, nary time!" and releasing the partially subdued young man, they slowly retraced their steps.

The last fallen savage had been carried off by his comrades, and our friends proceeded directly toward the two they had first encountered. As they stooped over the prostrate forms, a crowd of men rushed from the woods toward them with loud shouts. But the twain did not flee; they recognized their friends, who had heard the report of firearms and sallied out from the corral to assist our heroes, fearing they had got into trouble. Hank scalped the savages with his recovered knife, and the party returned to the camp, he narrating the events of their sally as they proceeded.

The colonel was not with them. They had left him still in a faint from loss of blood, and grief at the loss of his child.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD HANK'S VOW.

THE dawn broke clear and pleasant over the late strife, but the glorious "god of day" shone upon a sad and dreadful spectacle. The bodies of the Blackfeet that had fallen within the corral—those without having been carried off when the savages retreated—had been despoiled and then dragged from the little glade and cast into the bushes for their four-footed brethren, the coyotes, to feed upon.

Those of the emigrants who had fought their last battle were carefully arranged in a row, with their bodies composed as well as possible under the circumstances. Pale and tearful faces were bending over them, taking a long, last farewell of father, son, brother or husband, who so lately had been full of love, mirth and life, now, alas, with hearts stilled forever! It was a sad, mournful picture; one that is sacred from idle eyes.

All around was tangible proof of the fierceness of the strife that had passed. The ground was torn and trampled, and the coagulated blood stood in tiny pools upon the saturated ground, that refused to absorb its crimson offering. The wagons were blackened with smoke, and shattered with the leaden hail, the strokes of hatchets, sabers and bayonets. Men were reclining upon the ground in the shade, pale and blood stained, grimed with smoke and burnt powder. Perchance some loved one was bending over him, ministering to his wants, and sending up a silent, heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving that the one so dear to her had been spared—that *his* form was not included in that ghastly row yonder, lying so still and motionless, not a limb stirring at the frantic grief of the mourners, that might well awaken the dead.

But the scene is too sad, too full of woe, and we can not dwell upon it.

There is a group of men gathered forward, three in number. The form lying upon the rude couch is that of Colonel

Pinger. His wounds are many, yet not mortal, but he is prostrate and weak as a child. In vain he strives to rise. The gentle pressure of the guide's hand stays him. A touch that could not restrain a child, yet it is all-powerful with that once strong man.

"Don't be snatched, kurnel. 'Twon't do no good, fer ye cain't stand, let alone travel wi' us, fast as we've got to go. I know it's hard, but it cain't be helped. An' we'll do the best we can, the young feller an' me, an' start jist as soon as the men git back wi' a good hoss fer him," soothingly spoke the guide, with not a trace of rancor in his tones.

"Ah, God help me!" with a groan. "And I must lay here like a log when Josie—when my daughter is in the clutches of those fiends. I will not! Let me loose; I must go! Let up, I say!" foamed the father, struggling in the grasp of Triplett.

"Gently, gently, kurnel; ye cain't do it, an' on'y make matters worse by sich doin's. Ye couldn't stand a minute. What ye must do is to take it cool an' git strong as soon as ye can. Then ef ye've a mind to, ye can take a cumpany an' foller arter, pervided in course we hain't got her cl'ar afore then."

"Well, if I must I must, I suppose; but, it's hard, my God! how hard," he groaned, as he sunk back exhausted. "You don't know, you *can't* know, how I feel. She, my darling Josie, is all I have left upon earth to love, and now she is gone, taken from me perhaps forever!" and the bereaved father covered his face with his hands—those hands still dyed with the life-blood of his foes, as well as his own—and the tears trickled through his fingers.

"*Don't* I though, kurnel? To be shore I'm an old sinner, an' I hain't got wife nor children; don't know ef thar's one drop o' my blood in a vein thet hain't in this ole body. But I loved that child; yes, I loved her as though she war my own flesh an' blood. I loved her well enough to die fer her, an' please the pigs, I *will* die fer her, 'less I can do better—fetch her safe an' soun' back to yer arms. An' listen, Kurnel Pinger: I hev sworned to myself an' I now sw'ar to you, thet I won't rest or stop huntin' a moment; I won't do any thin' **else**, or think of any thin' else till I hev found her an' got **her**

away, 'less I go under in the 'tempt! I sw'ar this, an' ye hev my han' upon it, the han' of a man what never told a yarnest lie sence he war a shaver," spoke Hank Triplett, pressing the hand of the wounded man warmly.

"And here is another who swears the same," added Basil Croteau, who was kneeling before a little fire, casting bullets.

"It is well, since it can be no better," replied the colonel. "But, what are your plans, and when do we start?"

"They're simple an' easy told. Fust an' fo'most, we start jist as soon as a horse comes in fer Basil—a good one thet he can trust life to. We'll foller thar trail until we catch 'em, else hole 'em, then trust to Providence an' a strong heart."

"But, why go alone? Why not take more men?"

"'Ca'se we cain't hev enough to fight 'em. You're short handed now, an' two is better nor a dozen fer sarcumvention. An' thet's what we've got to depind on. It's a slim chaine, a mighty slim one, we hev, to catch 'em afore they git safe home 'mong the Black Hills. They rendezvous thar; I know the place like a book.

"Fust, you must git on yer feet as soon as may be, an' travel to the fort; 'tain't fur off. Then gather a wheen o' fellers, wi' a kupple o' mountain-men o' the right stripe, to show ye the way, an' strike out fer the 'Lady's Kenyon.' Any o' them 'll know whar *thet* is; an' wait fer me. I'll be thar ef I'm alive, an' ef we cain't do no better, why we'll make a night attack, an' cl'ar her ef we kin, 'less we leave our skulps to dry in the smoke o' the wigwam. D'ye understan'?"

"I'll do as you say. Let Croteau take my horse; he is good, none better, and start as soon as may be. Every moment will be an age to my darling that she spends in their power. Hark! I hear the tramp of horses' feet. They have got back at last."

"Ye're right, an' thar's ole Maneto, yer hoss. Whooray Now, young feller, ef ye're ready let's make a break."

"I am ready."

Their bullet-pouches and capacious powder-horns were filled, the arms and equipments of both men and horses were carefully examined and tested; and then they started with a cordial cheer and "God speed" from their companions, a well-filled haversack and canteen strapped to each saddle. Started

upon their perilous self-imposed mission of life or death—started with the chances a hundred to one in favor of the latter. But they thought not of that. They trusted in Providence, and, relying upon their own skill and strong arms to accomplish their object, rode out from the little glade with hearts filled with hope and confidence. They had weighed well the great danger and privations that awaited them, with their deep, overflowing love for Josie Pinger, and the scale sunk quickly in her favor.

They entered the trail and rode at a rapid rate. They had no difficulty in following it now, and advanced in a steady trot, which, while swift, does not fatigue a horse so rapidly as a gallop, than which more ground can be covered in a day at this gait.

Basil chafed at this caution, but was compelled to yield to the guide, who said :

“ Ye see, youngster, 'tain't no use to be snatched, an' we mought as well take it cool fust as last. We'll cotch 'em sooner a darned sight this a-way, than ef we rode like blazes. 'Ca'se why ; ef we made a spurt *now*, we'll git a little nearer the imps *fer a while*, but the animiles cain't stan' it very long, an' then down we come to a walk. Don't ye see the p'int? While now, wi' an hour's rest at noon an' a snack, they can travel all day this a-way.

“ An' now afore we go any further, I want to speak a few words thet ye must promise to 'bide by. Ef ye won't, why we may as well turn back now, afore we lose our skulps.

“ Fust an' fo'most, ye're in love. Never mind ; don't redden up so. It hain't no harm as I knows on, an' nobody's goin' to say any thin' ag'in' it ef she's willin'. An' then, you're young an' hot-headed ; young blood allays is, an' bein' in love wi' the leetle birdy don't help it any, when she's in danger. So much fer so much.

“ Now, it's a resky job, an' a big one we've got on han', an' one thet'll try our cuteness, now I tell ye. We need cool heads, an' so I want ye to promise to be guided in every thin'—mind thet now—*every* thin' by me. Do jest what I tell ye, an' *don't* do what I say not. D'ye promise? Mind, ef ye ain't a-goin' to keep it, say so now, afore it's too late.”

“ Yes, I promise to be controlled by your advice in **every**

thing. I know you have more skill and knowledge than I can boast of, but don't mistake me. I, too, have fought Indians before now, and trailed them, for that matter. And I trust you will not often have to complain of my 'greenness,'" replied Basil, frankly.

"I knowed it! I knowed it from the day we war huntin' fer sign on Dry Branch, 'member? I said to myself, said I, thet youngster hain't no small pertaters, *he* hain't. I see'd it warn't yer fust trip, 'ca'se ye set to work so judgmatical like, an' did it up slick. Who an' what air ye, anyhow, ef ye have no 'bjection ag'in' tellin'?"

"There isn't much to tell. I belong to a well-to-do family in Philadelphia. Was in my father's store; got tired and came out West to see a little life. Like it so well, that after two years, here I am yet. If all turns out right, I may return for good this fall."

"'Right,' I s'pose, means ef we git leetle birdy cl'ar all hunky, an' she says yes; the kurnel the same; then a big weddin' an' hooray boys! Hain't thet about the figure, eh?" chuckled Triplett.

"Pretty nigh, I confess. At least it will be if I have my way. But, I don't even know whether Miss Josie likes me or no. I fear—"

"No ye don't, nyther, young feller, 'less you're blinder nor a bat. I've see'd it fer some time. In course she plays shy an' cool-like, 'ca'se ye do the same, but it's thar, boy, it's thar for shore; an' jest ye say the word, throwin' in a leetle coixin' like, and ye'll see it too."

But, we need not prolong the conversation. Enough has been said to show their thoughts. It was a subject each was interested in, from their great love for its fine subject, Josie, the little darling. As they conversed they rode at a rapid pace, their eyes now bent upon the trail, still broad and plain; now keenly scrutinizing the horizon, more from habit than otherwise, as they had long since left behind them the trail on which they might chance upon travelers. Still they were upon their guard. For in the desert there is no knowing whom they may meet. It is constantly being traversed by predatory bands of both white and red men, oftentimes the former being the more dangerous—the "Road Agents," or

prairie pirates, far famed and dreaded—the refuse and off-scourings of the world. The adage—an enemy is met often, a friend seldom—holds true here, in no place more so.

With an hour's halt at noon, for refreshment of both man and horse, they rode on without interruption. The sun was still some distance from the western horizon, when, in a timber *motte*, they found the cold ashes of several camp-fires where the Indians had stopped, evidently for some time, as the grass and young leaves of the shrubs around were closely cropped by the teeth of their horses. Triplett was highly pleased thereat, so expressing himself to Basil, for he averred they had gained considerably upon them, already, judging from various signs, that he explained at length. There was a single mound of that peculiar shape that one seldom contemplates without a feeling of awe creeping over him—of a shape that tells of a human form sleeping its last, long sleep, of the quietness and oblivion that comes but after death—a little ways without the camping-ground.

This circumstance appeared to really puzzle Hank.

“I cain't see into it, noways, Baz. 'Cause why; I never yit see'd a Injun do a trick like thet. 'Tain't thar style. Now anybody thet see'd thet pile o' dirt 'uld know what it kivers. An' ef a red-skin finds it, he'll open it sure, an' ef 'tain't one o' his tribe, off comes the skulp. A Injun 'uld 'a' kivered it up level, trampin' it hard, an' then built a big fire over it, else tied a kupple o' hosses over it so't they'd trample it rough like. Then they'd hide the loose dirt, throw it in the creek yonder. Ef we had time, darned ef I wou'dn't open it, but we hain't, so le's travel.”

They only proceeded a few steps when Hank paused with a low whistle of chagrin. The trail divided, one portion going north, the other bearing toward the west. The latter was much the smaller. There was the large shod hoof-prints of a “States horse,” so distinguished from the prairie-born mustang, but that told no tale. They were with both parties, probably captured in some foray, or perchance from the train they had so lately been repulsed from.

“Young feller, you take thet one; I'll go north, an' foller it till most sundown, then come back hyar. You do the same, an' then we'll know better what to do. Don't let nothin'

'scape yer eyes, 'cause ef we make a mistake now, we're blocked, sure."

They parted and each rode upon their respective trails. It was nearly dark when they returned, almost at the same moment. Hank's tale was soon told. He had followed the trail for several miles, until it ceased at the banks of a considerable sized stream. It was too late for him to ascertain whether the toe had crossed, or proceeded up or down; the former most probably, as it was on the direct route to their town.

"Well, I had better luck," exclaimed Basil, as the guide concluded. "Some two miles from here, I found where, while trying to cross a creek, a horse had fallen and cast its rider upon the soft ground. One of their footprints—for there were two—was that made by a small shoe, and I know it was that of Miss Josie, it was so small and dainty—"

"Hold up!" interrupted Hank. "A woman's fut ye say, but what was the other?"

"A moccasin."

"Thunder! I don't see into it. Ef it's she, then 'twarn't Three Fingers arter all, as hed her, 'cause he don't live in thet direction. Ef 'twar on the other trail now. Are ye shore thar's no mistake?"

"Perfectly," replied Basil, confidently.

"Wal, then, we'll take thet one, bright an' airly in the mornin'."

"But, can't we follow to-night? The moon shines so clear."

"We mought, but then we run the resk o' losin' the trail. 'Sides, the hosses want rest an' food."

"Anyhow, let's go as far as the creek. It's only a little ways, and we will be so much nearer her," pleaded Basil.

"Wal, I don't keer, 'specially as thar's plenty o' grass an' water thar, ain't thar?" good-humoredly rejoined the guide.

"First rate and plenty of it," and they rode away at a rapid pace until they reached the designated point, where they encamped for the night.

CHAPTER V.

THE RED CAMP.

At earliest dawn the two scouts, after a hurried meal, mounted their horses, and dashed across the shallow creek upon whose bank they had encamped the preceding night. The trail was plain and distinct, and they rode on a smart canter. It was a beautiful morning, and despite the care that filled their breasts, a feeling of almost gayety grew upon them. The eastern horizon grew more light, and presently the sun showed its golden crest over the summit of a distant hill. The horses pranced and curveted at the unwonted restraint of a tightly-drawn rein, holding them down to a steady trot ; dashing the sparkling dewdrops from the bending blades of grass, scaring the overgrown "jack-rabbit" from its covert, and starting the coveys of quails and prairie-chickens from their roosts. Anon a fleet deer or graceful antelope would dart from some clump of underbrush, and flee, unnoticed by its usual enemy, save perchance by a passing glance. More exciting game was at hand, and for the time being they might pass free.

The trail led direct over a grassy, rolling prairie. The ground, sheltered by the knee-high grass, and still damp from the recent rain, was soft and had been deeply imprinted by the hoofs of the party our friends were searching for.

"This is easy work, eh, Hank?"

"Yas, easy 'nough now, but 'twon't be fer long, I'm afeard. They must know that some one 'uld be arter 'em helter skelter fer the gal, an' it beats me how keerless they be. Must either be well-mounted, 'less they're tarnal fools, an' I don't think they air the last.

"I can't rightly onderstan' it," he continued, after a pause. "I don't know whar they can be a-drivin' fer. Thar ain't no town up hyaraways, as I knows on, an' I thort I knowed all about the Blackfeet. Wal, we'll see afore long anyhow, fer they can't be fur ahead on us."

Nothing occurred of moment until noon, when they stopped for an hour to rest their animals. They halted in a small grove where there was a spring, as Hank was well aware, he often having tasted its cool water. Before they reached the *motte* the guide dismounted, and, leaving Basil in charge of the horses, he started off in a circuit to ascertain whether the timber had been lately visited or not. Finding no evidence of such being the case, they entered and were soon discussing a cold lunch, with appetites keenly sharpened by their long ride. Suddenly Hank spoke in a hissing whisper:

"Don't make a motion, young feller, fer yer life don't! 'less you want a bullet through yer ribs. Keep on eatin', ye fool ye, but lissen. Thar's a Injun thar ahint thet ol' burr-oak yonder, to yer right. I caught a glimpse o' his top-knot as he dodged back. Now when I slip off you jump ahint the tree, an' keep yer eye skinned fer red-hide. Don't shoot 'less ye hev a fa'r chaine. Be easy an' keep cool," and he carelessly wiped his mouth with his sleeve, then added, aloud: "Jeeminy criminy, young feller, ye put plenty o' salt on thet meat. I'm dry as a fish outen water," and picking up a canteen he arose, holding his rifle carelessly in the other hand, and coolly walked toward the spring. Then with a hiss of warning he plunged into the underbrush, and disappeared from view.

Basil, rifle in hand, leaped behind the tree against which he had been leaning, carefully keeping its trunk between him and the oak mentioned. His heart beat a little quicker than ordinary, but his nerves were calm and like steel. His eyes sent keen glances in every direction, for he did not know how many foes were around him, and did not relish a shot from behind. As may be imagined he awaited anxiously enough for some signal from Hank, for he had not the slightest idea of what were his plans. But he had confidence in him, and knew that if human agency could accomplish it, the guide would bring them both out all right.

A low but hearty burst of laughter met his ear. He started amazed, but stepped from his covert as he recognized the voice of old Hank. The latter stood leaning upon his long rifle, with head thrown back and hand pressing his side, convulsed with laughter. Basil, with wonder written upon his countenance, exclaimed:

"The Indians, Hank—what's the matter—what are you laughing at?"

"Ha! ha! ho! ho! ho! Injuns be darned; thar he is, ho! ho! ho!" pointing up in the tree-top.

"Where? pshaw, that's only a fox-squirrel! what do you mean?"

"Them's 'em. Oh, Lord, what fools we be; skeart at a foxy!" at last he muttered, sitting down upon the ground, faint from excessive mirth. "Yas, *thet's* the Injun. Ye see I jist caught a glimp' o' his tail as he whisked aroun' the tree, an' like a blasted fool, thort 'twas a red! Jeeminy criminy, two white men a-skeered o' a little foxy! Lord! Lord! we'd never hyar the last on it ef it ever got out on us," and he went off into another convulsion of merriment, that was joined in by Basil, while the innocent cause of all this commotion chattered and whisked his bushy tail as if wondering what possessed the two strange animals below.

Hank, after finishing their interrupted meal, proceeded to the edge of the timber to see if the coast was clear, while Basil busied himself in saddling and bridling the horses for the start. In a few moments the guide returned with an expression of deep disgust upon his face, and whispered:

"Tie the animiles quicker'n thunder. Thar's a red comin' on the back trail."

Together the twain glided back to the edge of the *motte*. Not over a couple of hundred yards distant, was the form of an Indian brave coming toward them at a sort of lope or dog-trot, warily glancing around him. Then he crouched until the tall grass nearly concealed him from view, only leaving the upper portion of his head revealed, while they could faintly see his fiery black eyes glitter in the sunshine.

"Bah! we mustn't let 'im git away. Hold, don't shoot, ye blasted younker! D'ye want to tell the reds thet we're a comin'? Ye stop hyar an' don't stir or pull trigger, 'less he gits cl'ar o' me. Ef he shed see our trail, an' git off, he'll go fer help an' then good-by fer our chainece to git leetle birdy cl'ar. Gi' me yer knife," and he glided off through the timber.

The spy, or scout, as may be, had turned in his course, and was close skirting the *motte*, evidently fearing it might con-

ceal an enemy, or else as a mere matter of precaution. Basil watched in breathless suspense, with leveled rifle and sights bearing full upon the plumed head of the savage, whenever this appeared in view. A casual observer, or one who was not on the keen look-out for some such object, would scarcely have noticed any thing unusual on the prairie. As he watched, the red-man discovered the plain trail left by their horses—he was still without the circle left by the guide while performing the same duty—and instantly paused. He half-way arose, the better to examine it. There could be but one meaning to the foot-prints. They had been written upon the soft sward some hours after the larger trail had been made.

He uttered a guttural exclamation; but never another, for a tall form now arises from the ground, partially behind the warrior, its arm is drawn back, then the bright steel flashes in the clear sunlight, as it hisses through the air, and is buried to the hilt in the back of the Indian. A howl of mingled pain and surprise bursts from his lips; then he turns, only to be borne to the ground by the powerful form of Hank Triplett, whose brawny hand effectually stifles the whoop that arises to his lips; then another knife is driven once, twice, thrice into the red-man's body.

Coolly catching the long, braided scalp-lock, Hank quickly circled his blade around the Indian's head, and jerked off the scalp. Wiping his knife, he attached the disgusting trophy to his belt, saying:

"Come, feller, give us a lift, an' let's put the purp outen the way."

The two carried the body into the bushes, where they concealed it beyond chance of discovery, at least for a time.

"A purty throw, warn't it?"

"Yes; but who is he, and what do you think he wa after?"

"Wal, he is, or rayther *was*, a dirty Sioux, an' thet puzzles me. What on airth is one o' *his* tribe a-doin' with Blackfeet? Beats my time all holler. I'm afeard, boy, 'at we've made a big mistake *an' follered the wrong trail!* Darned ef I don't. But it cain't be helped now, an' we must see it out.

"As to what he war arter, that's plain. He war sent back to see ef anybody war a-follerin' thar trail."

"But come," replied Corteau, "don't let's waste time talking but be up and doing," as he led forth the horses.

"Not so fast, youngster ; not so fast, ef ye please. It 'pears like as ef thar warn't no need o' any sich hurry, an' now I thinks on it, ye mought as well slip the bits outen the horses' mouths, an' let 'em eat thar fill. They'll need it afore long," coolly rejoined Triplett, as he seated himself upon a log, at the same time filling his pipe with tobacco, and lighting it with a "prairie match," then puffing a huge column of smoke toward the astonished youth, who stared at him as if in doubt whether he had not suddenly lost his senses.

"What on earth do you mean, Hank ? Are you mad ?"

"No ; but I will be ef ye don't do as I tell ye. Fix the critters fust, an' then I'll tell ye my reasons."

This was soon done, and Basil seated himself alongside Triplett, who said :

"Fust smoke a pipe an' take it easy. Ye see this red is, or rather was, one o' them chaps we're arter ; his actions showed thet plain enough. Wal, he war sent back to see ef anybody war a-follerin' 'em, an' he come on foot. Consequently he couldn't hev many miles to travel, else he'd tuck a hoss. An' he would 'a' done so anyhow, ef they warn't a'most shore they war traile'd ; fer a man on foot can hide and dodge about better'n one wi' a hoss. Now thar's two ways. Eyther he tuck a hoss an' left him a ways back while he come to reconnoiter, else he was afoot altogether. But ef the fust, why didn't he begin to creep sooner'n he did ?

"An' now, as I make it, the imp's hain't more'n six miles off, a-campin' on the further side o' Big Stony. I knows the place, an' soon as I gits my smoke out, I'll take a tramp out thet way, an' see for shore. Ye see, ef we go ahead on the hosses, some o' the reds 'll spy us, shore. I can sneak up, an' they won't be a bit the wiser. Then I'll come back, an' at dark we'll start, an' be in plenty time to do what we can onder kiver o' night. Don't ye see the p'int ?" concluded Hank.

"But why do they halt so near if they think they are pursued, especially as their force is so small ?"

"I don't know. It's a darned queerious affair from fust to last. I never see'd its like afore, an' blame me ef I want to

ag'in," pettishly ejaculated Triplett, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and returning it to the holder. "But now, youngster, I'm goin', an' I want ye, fust, to tie the hosses to some tree whar the bushes is thick, an' giv 'em plenty to eat. Leave the saddles an' bridles on, but don't pit the bits in. Then ye must keep a good look-out, keepin' clus kivered, an' don't let any one come nigh afore ye see 'em. Ef they *shed* come, don't make a break onless ye hev to, an' then do yer darndest to save both the hosses, 'ca'se 'thout them we're played, shore. Now mind," and Hank glided off, stooping almost to a level with the grass, trailing his rifle in one hand.

Several hours elapsed before his return, that dragged wearily enough to the excited brain of the young man, as he slowly paced the rounds of the grove. Naturally his mind was filled with thoughts of Josie Pinger, and his heart misgave him as he realized the difficult task he had undertaken. As he weighed the chances for and against its success, the case appeared almost hopeless. But he did not despair—it was not in him to do so. He shook off his forebodings, and gave himself up to building air castles, upon a weak and insecure foundation 'tis true, but they were none the less beautiful and pleasant. He did not dare think she loved him, but he trusted to win her in time. She only knew him as a common teamster, as did her father, who he knew was very proud, and a man to reject scornfully such an alliance for his almost idolized daughter. But he had little fear on that score. He knew that his true situation in life would satisfy even him, when all was known.

Though occupied with these fancies, Basil was not negligent of the trust reposed in him by the guide, and observed the latter while yet some distance from the *motte*, and when he drew nearer hailed him in a cautious tone. This seemed to gratify Triplett, and he expressed as much. In reply to the numerous queries of Basil, as to whether he had seen Josie, Hank replied:

"Wal, no, not adzactly; but I reckon it's all right. Thar's a female woman thar a pris'ner, an' who else could it be but her? Fact is, young feller, things is mixed up a heap now, I tell ye, an' darned ef I see how it all come about!" vexedly exclaimed the worthy guide.

"Fust and ~~fo~~'most, leetle birdy was captered by Three Fin-

gers' Blackfeet; *thet's* plain, so fur. Wal, we follered 'em ontill the trail divided, an' tuck the one thet hed a gal's fut-prints on. An' now comes the bother. What on airth did the chief let them cussed infarnal prairie pirates or Road Agents hev her fer ef he wanted her so darned bad hisself?"

"The Road Agents—what do you mean?" exclaimed Basil, with a sinking heart.

"Jest what I said," hastily replied Triplett. "The trail we're on is made by them rascals. Part on 'em air white, or rayther pertend to be, wi' a smart sprinklin' of Injuns, makin' p'r'aps a kupple o' dozen in all. They's met another gang at the ford, I reckon.

"Ye see, it turned out jest as I 'spected, an' I found thar camp at the ford on the "Stony." They've stuck up a kupple o' tents, an' 'pear to be goin' to make a stay of it. Whether long or not, I cain't say. They're in a darned hard place to enter unbeknown to 'em. 'Tany rate it'll be long enough fer our puppose. As I layed low in the bushes, takin' notes, so's to l'arn the best way to git in, I saw a white lift the door o' one o' the tents to go in, an' I caught a glimp' o' leetle birdy in the funder end. I didn't git more'n half a peep, but 'twar enough, so I sloped, and here I am."

"Well, but when do you start, and what are your plans?" eagerly queried Basil.

"Not afore dark; so ye mought jest as well take it cool. As to the how, we caint fou't 'em, so we must trust to sarcum-vention. We'll fix it so's to git clus to the ford, then leave the hosses wi' ye, while I cross over an' try for the leetle birdy. Stop!" he added, peremptorily, as Basil was about to insist upon sharing the danger with him. "I know what I'm about, an' one kin do a darned sight bette rthan two. Ef I kin git her cl'ar, well an' good; I'll make tracks fer ye, an' once mounted I reckon we kin guv 'em the go-by."

"But why don't you want to take the horses close to the river?"

"'Ca'se it's too rocky, an' they mought be h'ard. In course, we could muffle 'em, but it would be runnin' a resk, an' thar's enough 'thout that," replied Hank, who began carelessly fill-
ing his pipe, in which he was imitated by Basil.

During the time that must elapse before dark, the hour they

intended starting upon their perilous mission, they did not neglect keeping a good look-out to prevent discovery, should any enemy chance that way. But they were not disturbed, and as the sun sunk behind the western horizon, they began preparations for starting for the enemy's camp.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEATH-SHOT.

NIGHT came at last, and with it the wind rose, moaning and howling over the prairie, while the moon was obscured by the dense and gloomy clouds that shrouded the earth below in darkness. It seemed as though Providence was smiling upon them, and the spirits of our two friends rose higher.

A line of timber and undergrowth bordered the stream, of perhaps a hundred yards in width, and the scouts, who had cautiously led their horses for the last half-mile, tied them just within the outskirts, where they would be easy of access, yet secure from discovery by any person passing nigh, unless they betrayed their proximity by some noise. But this must be chanced, and Hank departed for the enemy's camp, with a strict injunction to Basil not to leave the animals for a moment, unless he (Triplett) was discovered by the foe. Then he was to come as far as the river-bank, to lend a hand if necessary; but should the guide get captured, he was to flee with the horses back to the fort, and lead a party back to effect what they could.

Slowly and cautiously Hank crossed the river, noting the best route by which to return, so as to avoid the numerous obstacles; and then he lay half-concealed in the grass upon the verge of the hostile encampment.

This was pitched close to the river-edge, a little below the ford: A steep rocky bluff covered the rear and one side; the other, a clear prairie devoid of undergrowth, and covered with a smooth carpet of grass, that grew more luxuriant as it

neared the creek. They did not appear to heed discovery, for a half-dozen fires still faintly gleamed between the water and two tents. A little in the rear of the fires and to the left of the tents, were stretched a score of men dressed in wild and rough habiliments, while the weapons glittered in their belts as they moved, or the fires glowed more brightly as some brand dropped into them.

Hank noticed all this with a glance of his keen gray eye, but he uttered a silent curse as he caught sight of the shadowy form of a sentinel as he stalked between the guide and the fires. Cautiously stealing around to the rear of the tents, close to the bluff, Hank crouched behind one of them, undecided what course to pursue. Presently he muttered:

"It has got to be did, fer thar's no gittin' leetle birdy away while thet red's a-marchin' thar. *Thet's* settled!" drawing his knife from its leathern sheath, and thrusting the blade up his sleeve, holding the buckhorn haft in his hand.

Then prostrating himself, he stealthily crawled away from the tent like an enormous lizard, carefully keeping within the dense shadow cast by the bluff, and slowly approached the back of the guard. When nearly at the point he wished to attain, his hand inadvertently pressed upon a dried twig, snapping it, with a slight noise that attracted the attention of the sentinel, who slowly advanced in the direction of the noise, cautiously peering through the darkness, and releasing the steel hatchet from his belt as he did so.

Mentally cursing his carelessness, the scout prepared for the struggle that now appeared inevitable. The savage noiselessly approached, but the glare of the fires beyond shining in his eyes must have partially blinded him, for he noted not the dusky, shadow-like form of the guide, who was now almost at his feet. At the same time his own body loomed up against the sky. Suddenly Hank leaped up before him, fastening a vice-like grip upon his throat, a keen blade is sheathed in his broad breast, the hot life-blood spurts from the wound as the weapon is withdrawn, only again to enter the heaving bosom. A few slight quivers, a convulsive gurgle, and those muscular limbs are stilled forever. Gently lowering the body to the ground, Hank glanced around to learn if the slight noise had alarmed the camp. His fears relieved, the Indian's scalp was

added to the one at his belt, and then lifting the corpse in his arms he carefully pushed it into the water, where it floated with the current down the river.

Triplett now returned to the camp, and glided toward the tent where he had seen the captive secured. As he listened with his ear closely pressed against the canvas, he heard the low sobbings of some one in distress. This he doubted not was Josie Pinger. He now moved around toward the entrance, but was not a little startled and disconcerted at perceiving the motionless form of a man sitting in front of the doorway, or rather flap of canvas that answered for that purpose. He soon discovered that it was a white man, who was lazily puffing away upon his pipe.

Again he crept forward—again the deadly knife was used, but the blow was not instantaneously fatal, and the man writhed from his grasp, at the same time uttering a loud scream of agony.

A terrified shriek burst from the interior of the tent as Hank darted in, and catching up the captive as though she was an infant, he placed one hand over her mouth to stifle her screams, and then darted to the river. As he plunged in, he saw that the group by the fireside were hastily grasping their weapons and bounding toward the spot where they heard the splash. Just then the moon broke from behind a cloud, and plainly revealed his form to the eyes of his enemies. The loud cry of discovery was mingled with a volley of rifle and pistol balls, and a sharp twinge in the right side of the guide told him that at least one ball had reached its mark. Then came one single report, and he heard a dull crash, and then a stifled moan from his fair burden.

He felt the hot life-blood splash over his face and neck, and raising one hand he placed it upon her face. He uttered an exclamation of horror and grief as he hastily withdrew it. Her forehead was crushed, and the bullet must have entered her brain, killing her instantly, as he could not feel her heart beating. For an instant, he half turned and paused as if to face his enemies, and appeared about to dart forward to take a summary vengeance for the dastardly shot. But prudence prevented him. He saw the band of yelling miscreants plunge into the river, and knew that there could be

but one ending to such an act. That he would be overpowered by mere force of numbers. So he continued his flight, with heart almost bursting with grief, for he loved Josie Pinger—loved her with all the fervor of his great soul ; and now she was dead ! dead—killed in his arms, and he vowed a solemn, dreadful oath, to wreak a bloody, terrible vengeance upon her murderers—to devote the remainder of his life to that one end.

As he reached the shore, his pursuers were nearly in the middle of the stream. The moon still shone brightly, and he uttered a shout of defiance as he darted into the friendly timber. He could hear the tramp of his comrade as he hastened toward the river, and also his voice as he shouted encouragement. Then he cried :

“Go back—go back to the hosses : I’m a-comin’ !” for he dreaded the result, should Basil set eyes upon the form of his murdered love.

Darting to one side of the trail, Hank soon reached a dense clump of bushes, in which he hastily placed the body of the young girl. He knew that the pursuit would be hot, and to escape safely would require all their skill and coolness. And he knew, that did Croteau learn what had befallen, he would either become so stupefied as to be helpless, else so desperate that all would be ruined. So leaving the hapless victim, he glided at his utmost speed toward the spot where the horses had been left. But the momentary delay had nearly proved fatal. He could hear the loud crashing and oaths of the pirates as they darted along, not a score of paces in his rear. Then he heard a loud whistle from Basil, and a few more leaps carried him to the side of his whinnying horse. As he leaped to his saddle, he struck Basil’s horse a violent blow, and then they sped along the edge of the timber, so as to keep within the shadows cast by the overhanging trees.

Then came the wild yells of baffled rage and vengeance, and mingling with the furious oaths and curses, they could distinguish the order : “Let’s get the horses !” A portion of the band hotly pursued them on foot, while others hastened back for the animals. Not that the former hoped to overtake our friends, but they wished to keep them in sight if possible, and by this means avoid losing the trail in the dark.

ness, while by their continued shouts they could guide their companions.

Hank did not vouchsafe any reply to the numberless inquiries put to him by Basil, as to how he came to be discovered, and whether he had seen Josie; safe that he would tell his story when they were out of danger; he did not dare break the dreadful news, as yet.

For half an hour they rode as rapidly as the darkness and nature of the ground would permit; then quoth Hank:

"Come, young feller, let's make a turn on 'em up this holler. They cain't see us nor our trail nyther, it's so dark."

They rode in a slow canter at a right angle from the direction they had been pursuing, and then when a milé had been traversed, turned and sped rapidly back toward the ford. While doing this, Triplett pondered anxiously, as to the course he should pursue—whether he should tell the whole truth at once, or wait until he gained possession of the body, which was his present object. He could not leave her where she was for the wild beasts to find, should the pirates not discover her on their return, but resolved that she should have Christian burial. In reply to the renewed queries of the anxious lover, he spoke solemnly, at the same time laying his hand tenderly upon the arm of Basil.

"Yas, I see'd her, boy; see'd her, an' held her in my arms—"

"You did? Why did you leave her then?" almost fiercely demanded Basil.

"The Lord knows 'twarn't my fault; I'd 'a' died ef I could, to save one finger o' the leetle birdy from harm."

"My God, Hank, what do you mean? Is she—Josie—hurt?" cried Croteau, while a cold, icy hand seemed grasping his heart.

"No, boy, she hain't hurt; she cain't be hurt no longer," replied Hank, while the large, scalding tears trickled through the hairy mass that covered his face. "Yas, she's free now, an' won't know any more trouble an' danger. Be a man, youngster, be a man! The Lord has took her home to him. We might 'a' knowed it, fer she was too good an' pure an' bright, to live long wi' us. I know it's hard, boy, orful hard, an' by my own heart I can tell what ye must feel. Cheer up an'

don't take it so hard," he added, as he steadied the tottering form of the stricken youth, who seemed stupefied by the terrible shock.

"I can feel fer ye, lad, I can, fer I loved her, God only knows how much ! She 'peared like a part o' my heart, she did, an' now she's gone, dead—killed by them infarnal devils ! Bear up, youngster, be a man ; we've got work afore us. Yas, work—*work* ; an' thet is to hev revenge on them villions as has did this !" fiercely gritted the guide, as his form seemed to dilate, while his eyes glowed with a deadly hate as he hissed the words.

"Yes, revenge, revenge is good—oh, so sweet ! and we will revel in it, you and I, old friend," wildly replied Basil, as he straightened up in his saddle, and gripped his rifle with a force as though he would crush the steel barrel. "Yes, I will be a man—an avenger—and woe be unto those who have done this deed ! They shall have little to boast of when we are done with them. That is all I care to live for now—revenge ; and they shall soon know our names, old friend ; they will know us for Josie's avenger. Ha ! ha ! ha ! I see blood—blood—blood—oceans and rivers of it, nothing but blood. Oh, my God, Josie ! Josie !" he shrieked, and tossing his arms wildly in the air, would have fallen, but for the sustaining hand of Hank.

"It's orful, orful !" groaned Triplett. "I'm sadly afeard the lad'll go crazy over it. Wake up, Basil, wake up ! an' 'member what's afore us," he cried, in the youth's ear, at the same time shaking him by the shoulder.

"Yes, I'll waken. I can't sleep now ; *she* won't let me sleep. She is here—there—everywhere I look. She calls for vengeance, and I must obey. Yes, Josie, *my* Josie, I hear you, and terribly shall you be avenged !

"Do not fear for me, old friend," with a wan smile. "I shall not go crazy—I can not yet, I have too much to do. Lead on, I will follow."

"Thet's it, Basil, we cain't stop to cry now. We've got too much work to do. Fust we mus' git the body of leetle bairdy, an' gi' it a Christian burial ; then we'll take the trail an' hev revinge."

During this time they had been unconsciously riding forward

at a rapid rate, and now they were nearly opposite the ford. They proceeded with more caution, for they did not know how many of the enemy were at the camp or lurking around the timber. They struck the woods at a point a little below where they halted before, and dismounting, Hank left Basil with the horses, and cautiously glided toward the covert where he had left the murdered girl. As he neared the spot, he suddenly became aware of there being another person near the point he was aiming for. By changing his position he at length made out the dusky form of a man, who was slowly pacing to and fro beneath the spreading boughs of a tree, where there was a small space clear from underbrush. The guide's rifle leaped to his cheek as if by instinct, but was quickly lowered, for he dared not fire, as he did not know how many foes were nigh. Then he sought and found a dried stick that he snapped with a sharp noise, at the same time drawing his knife. The crack met the ear of the pirate, and he paused in his tramp and peered cautiously through the gloom. Hank decided upon a bold course, and as the man uttered the challenge, "Who's thar?" he replied, in a gruff tone:

"It's me; is that you, Jim?"

"No, 'tain't Jim; an' who in thunder is *me*?" replied the pirate.

"Why, don't you know me?" at the same time walking boldly forward, carefully keeping his face in the shadow.

"Who—thet you, Simpson?"

"Yas," answered Triplett, with a laugh, as he drew close to the unsuspecting man. "It's me!" and with a panther-like bound he grasped the pirate by the throat and buried his long blade deep in his breast.

The blow was repeated, although there was no need of that, for the man died without a groan. Hank lowered the corpse to the ground, and coolly wiped his knife upon its garments before returning it to its sheath, muttering:

"'Tain't of'en thet I've did the like o' this, leastways to one who called hisself a white man. But he desarved it all an' more too, which no doubt his master'll give him afore long. He's one o' them thet killed leetle birdy, an' it's jist what'll overtake the others too, 'less I miss my guess."

A cloud rolled over the moon, and it was a few moments

before the guide could find the exact place where he had left the girl's body, but then, reverently lifting it in his arms, he retraced his footsteps until he reached the spot where Basil was awaiting his return with the horses. Not a word was spoken as the bereaved lover bent over in his saddle and relieved Triplett of his burden. Hank mounted, and then mutely offered to take the corpse, but Basil motioned him off with an impatient gesture, muttering :

"No, no, old friend, she is mine now—all mine. No other arms shall hold her but mine, for the short time she remains above earth. Mine, mine, all mine now !" and he pressed a frenzied kiss upon the cold, blood-stained brow.

Triplett did not reply—he could not. His heart was too full of woe, and a huge lump seemed to keep rising in his throat that he in vain tried to swallow. It was the first great grief that had befallen him since childhood.

Early in life he had lost both father and mother, murdered in the dead of night by the bloodthirsty red-men. He was too young then for the blow to make a very deep impression upon his mind ; but as he grew older, the story was related to him from time to time, until he joined a band of trappers bound for the far North-west, and struck his first blow for vengeance. Years had elapsed since then, and he had dearly repaid the debt ; still he did not abandon his purpose, although he was not as ferocious as formerly. He had never known the love of wife or children, and until he had met with sweet Josie Pinger he knew not the wealth of love his heart was capable of bestowing. But he loved her, and would gladly have laid down his life to save her one pang, and now, this was the end !

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, his heart shrunk within itself, his eyes glowed and his teeth gritted as he uttered a silent vow to dearly avenge her murder. He would live for nothing else, would make himself terribly known to her ruthless destroyers as a NEMESIS who would never relent—who would never leave the trail while life and strength lasted.

They were rapidly speeding across the prairie, back toward the *motte* they had left at dusk. Basil touched not the rein ; he was fully absorbed with the form of his dead love that lay so cold and still within his arms. But his horse was well

trained, and kept close to that of the guide, who led the way.

Just now the full, bright moon sailed in all her splendor from beneath a cloud, and cast a flood of light upon the swiftly-moving forms beneath. The guide heard a cry, and turning in his saddle beheld Basil suddenly check his horse and gaze wildly upon the pale face that rested against his shoulder. Then he uttered another cry so wild and full of joy that Triplett feared his young comrade had gone crazy in reality, and spurred his horse back to his side. Then he saw too, knew the whole truth, and with a fervent "Thank God!" caught the slight form as it was escaping from the relaxed grasp of Basil, and gently lowered it to the ground as he dismounted.

"Speak, old friend, speak and tell me if it is all a dream, a terrible dream?"

"Praise the Lord, boy, 'tain't no dream. 'Tain't *our* leetle birdy as is killed at all, but some one else's! Thank God fer his marcy!" solemnly replied Hank, while tears of joy rolled down his cheeks.

Basil uttered one long cry of joy, and would have fallen from his saddle had not the strong arm of his comrade upheld him, then assisted him to alight. They stood over that fair form, showing clear and distinct in the pale moonlight, and saw that they had been mistaken—that it was a stranger over whom they had mourned, thinking the victim was Josie Pinger.

She was fair, despite the disfiguring wound that had caused her death, and stained the bright, golden locks that hung around her face, with a deeper tinge. She was young, and her form was slight but perfectly molded, and she doubtless had been as dearly beloved by some persons as the being she had been mistaken for.

But our friends soon threw off the mental incubus that fettered their minds, for they knew that they must be far distant before day dawned—upon the ~~best~~ track to the spot where they had *taken the wrong trail*.

They mounted; this time Hank ~~supported~~ the unfortunate who had met such a terrible end, and rode rapidly until they gained the point they were aiming for. Then

they hollowed out a rude, shallow grave with their knives, throwing out the loosened dirt with their hands, and gently lowered the body to its last resting-place on earth, wrapped in one of their blankets. The dirt was filled in and closely pressed down ; then Basil offered up a fervent prayer for the repose of the fair unknown whom they had met in so strange a manner. Hank piled a lot of brush upon the spot, and set fire to it, for he knew that then the grave would never be molested by any animals, whatever fate might await it from man.

Then, with feelings of joy and sadness, they spurred out from the *motte* and galloped away over the prairie, to start anew upon the trail they had so unfortunately abandoned.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVAL HYENAS.

LEAVING our heroes for the time being, we must follow the fortunes of our heroine, Josie Pinger, and her maiden aunt, Miss Medora, and learn how they fared during their captivity.

As before stated, when the attack upon the emigrant-train began, the two ladies sought refuge within the ambulance that had been their conveyance from their far-distant home. Through the beginning of the conflict they were not disturbed or harmed, although the vehicle was more than once struck by some random missile. But it is needless to say that they were terribly alarmed, and every moment expected to hear the triumphant yells of the foe, announcing the defeat of the whites. It seemed as though the struggle could not last a minute, so terrible was the din, and that a human being could not possibly survive the deadly showers of rifle-balls and arrows that whizzed and hurtled through the air. What then was their surprise and joy when the colonel drew near and told them the real facts—that so few had been killed and wounded. Their spirits began to revive, and they allowed a

faint ray to lighten their hearts, that they *might* chance to live through that horrible night, and witness the defeat of their bloodthirsty foes.

Then came that last terrific onslaught, and as they peered through the crevices of the curtains, they could see the dusky fiends as they swarmed over the barricade, and then the hand-to-hand conflict. They were gazing appalled upon the battle, when the ambulance was roughly shaken, and the curtain severed with the slashing stroke of a knife. A hideous, paint-bedaubed face was thrust close to that of Josie, and then, with a gratified grunt the intruder grasped her slight form, uttering a few words of command to his followers, who seized the thin, wiry form of the spinster, and both were dragged from the carriage, it being overthrown in the struggle. The savage who held Josie uttered the long-drawn, quavering cry of retreat. Then, as she recovered her speech, she shrieked at the top of her voice for help. A blood-stained hand was pressed roughly over her mouth, while her captor hastily scrambled over the barricade and fled.

She lost all consciousness then, and did not recover her senses until the Indians had reached their horses and mounted. Then she awoke, only to find herself a helpless captive, tightly clasped to the brawny breast of a savage, supported before him upon the horse's withers. Then they dashed out from the timber, but as they did so, she turned her head and beheld the faint, shadowy forms of two persons rapidly speeding toward them. Instinctively she knew they were friends, and uttered the cry for help that reached the ears of the guide and Basil. Then she saw the bright flame spout from the muzzle of the guide's rifle, and a dull thud as her captor relaxed his grasp and they both fell to the ground together. They were lifted again, and then the Indians sped onward.

But Hank's shot was not fatal, although all thought so at first. The ball had glanced off from the side of the savage's head, fracturing the skull but not causing death, and Three Fingers, the head war-chief of the Kainna branch or division of the Blackfeet, still lived. His body was lifted up and carefully balanced before a brave, while the flight was still continued, for the Indians anticipated instant pursuit by the whites, forgetting or not knowing that their horses were all astray,

where they had been hobbled and turned loose to graze. This they did not know, and it is probable that to that fact our two daring friends owed their lives.

When Josie saw that hope vanish, faint as it was, she gave one wild, wailing cry of anguish and again swooned away. The antiquated spinster for a wonder made no outcry ; indeed, as she afterward affirmed privately to Josie, her native modesty was so shocked at finding herself so closely embraced by the arms of a *man*, and that man *en dishabille*, that she *could* not utter a word ! However, be that as it may, she lay a passive captive in the grasp of a huge, greasy, paint-besmeared Blackfoot, who sat his wild, half-tamed mustang like a centaur.

When day broke, no signs of pursuit being visible, the defeated war-party made a short halt at a creek that lay across the trail they must follow, and the wound of their chieftain was examined and carefully dressed. He did not appear to be suffering, and breathed calmly and regularly, but was unconscious. Then he was placed in a sort of litter made by stretching a couple of buffalo-skins between two horses, so as to avoid any unnecessary jolting, while a warrior rode at the head of each to keep them in position.

While this was being accomplished, and after a consultation between the principal braves, the dead savages they had recovered from the battle-ground were conveyed a short distance down the creek and temporarily placed in a considerable sized cave, the entrance of which was securely hidden from any chance observer—a huge stone being rolled before the mouth to exclude wild animals. The trail was carefully obliterated as they returned.

Then the flight was continued, but at a slower pace than before, for they had gained such a start that they knew there was little danger of being overtaken by a pursuing party of the whites, should such follow. Josie had recovered her consciousness, but the captives were too despondent to converse, even had they been allowed such indulgence by their captors.

At noon they halted at the little grove where our friends were so unfortunately thrown off the right trail into the one they followed with such a tragical ending. And now we may as well state the real facts.

It appears that the band of pirates or Road Agents had

entered the trail of the Indians at a point where they had crossed a creek whose banks were very rocky, extending a good distance on either side of the water. This was the reason why the new trail was not perceived by the guide. They paused only long enough at the *motte* to bury one of their comrades who had died on the road from the effects of a gunshot wound, received that same day in an attack on a party of emigrants. They feared the return of the war-party or some of their scouts, being ignorant of the real facts, and so hastened off as soon as they had completed their task.

At the ford a few miles distant, while attempting to cross, the horse bearing their captives fell, throwing both its riders, thus leaving the footprints that lured our two scouts from the trail they would otherwise have followed.

Who the unfortunate maiden was who had met such an untoward end, they never learned, and could only conjecture that she had been abducted at the fight in which the outlaw met his death. To resume.

The war-party halted at the grove, both to allow their horses the rest and food they so much needed, as well as to refresh themselves after the conflict and the arduous ride they had since undergone. A few warriors left the *motte*, and soon the crack of their rifles was heard; and then they returned bearing a brace of deer and several wild turkeys, that were soon dressed and sputtering upon the coals. The captives were plentifully supplied with food and water. Of this Miss Medora managed to stow away a rather considerable quantity, despite her continued lamentations and bursts of grief, but Josie was too much prostrated, both in mind and body, to touch any of it.

Sad and troubled thoughts filled her mind, and burying her face in her hands, she wept bitterly. She did not know what was to be her fate, or whether she should ever regain her freedom. Then thoughts of her father; was he alive or dead? She fearing the latter, wept afresh at the dread thought. Visions, too, of a youthful, manly form appeared, and she gleaned some little consolation that he at least was alive; for she had recognized him as one of the two who had attempted her rescue at the moment when their captors spurred out upon the prairie.

After a couple of hours' rest, the Blackfeet again pursued their journey, their chief, Three Fingers, being conveyed as before. But the captives were both mounted on led horses, a considerable number of which were along, being those once owned by the braves who had fallen in the attack upon the wagon-train.

Josie's hopes were revived as she noted the apparent negligence with which they were guarded. Her naturally buoyant spirit could not long be subdued, and vague, oftentimes ridiculous plans of escape were weighed in her mind, only to be discarded as she learned their folly. Still, she did not abandon her new-found hope—it was too sweet to be relinquished, and she broached the subject to her aunt, who rode close by her side. The spinster, although rather romantic upon one subject, as doubtless the reader has learned, was nevertheless very sensible and reasonable upon other points. Quoth she :

"Taint no use, child ; we must wait patiently. Our friends will not neglect us, and I'm lookin' for 'em every identical minute."

"Yes, but aunty, they may not know where we are, or else be too late to do any good," replied Josie, despondently.

"Well, but what can us two poor lone women do ?"

"Why, you see, I've thought of that. The Indians don't appear to be very watchful, and as we are pretty well mounted, why not give them a race ? We *might* get away, for I don't believe they would shoot us. Anyhow, we might try, and by riding straight back the way we came, we would meet our friends as they follow our tracks," whispered poor verdant Josie, in a low, anxious tone, bending toward her aunt to prevent their captors from hearing what she said, if by any chance they should understand English.

Miss Medora did not reply for some moments, during which she appeared weighing the chances for and against the plan.

"It won't do, Josie. If we hain't got the *worst* horses, there's lots of better and faster ones among them, and we would be caught before we rode half a mile, even if the Injuns didn't shoot us at the start. No, we must wait as patiently for other help as we can.

"I don't think," she resumed, after a slight pause, speaking in a more hopeful tone, "I don't think that Hank—Mr Tripple, I should say," blushing slightly, "will give us up so without a trial, and he is a smart man, you know. Everybody says so!"

"I hope so, I'm sure," sighed Josie, hopelessly, "but I fear it will be all in vain. And, dear papa—we don't know whether he is alive or not!" and her eyes filled with tears, while her lip quivered at the mournful picture her words conjured up.

"Don't cry, child," said the other, comfortingly; "*I* don't think he's hurt, and am lookin' for him and Mr. Tripple, and that conceited, stuck up prig, Basil Croteau—"

"Why, aunt Medora, how can you? Basil—Mr. Croteau isn't stuck up in the least. I'm sure he has always acted like a perfect gentleman, and I don't see why you dislike him so!" indignantly replied our heroine.

"Oh, ho! that's the way the wind blows, is it? If I'd a-known you were in love—"

A spirited rejoinder was upon the pouting lips of Josie, but it was checked by one of the savages, who grumbled:

"Too much talk for squaws. Mus' stop, or me tie tongue. Ugh!"

This put a stop to the conversation for the time being, and they rode on in silence.

Nothing worthy of note occurred during the succeeding two days. The party traveled at a steady pace that rapidly devoured the distance, only halting for rest at noon and night, when their hunters would depart for game. The captives were treated with unusual consideration, although whether this would have been the case had Three Fingers' wound proved fatal, is more than doubtful. But he was known to have taken a deep fancy—it can be called nothing else—for the youngest captive, and they dreaded his anger too much for them to incur it by harsh treatment. So our two friends had nothing to seriously complain of in this regard, although their captivity was none the less to be deplored.

The war-chief still continued in a state of insensibility as a general thing, although he had had several short spells of lucidity.

At noon of the fourth day succeeding the attack, while the war-party were halted in a grove of trees that bordered a stream running at the base of a long, low hill, and awaiting the return of a party of hunters who, as usual, had sallied out for food immediately the stream had been reached, they were thrown into commotion by the report of one of the hunters, who apparently brought tidings of import, but whether welcome or otherwise, our friends could not determine. Had they understood the Blackfoot tongue, they would have learned that a large party of their hereditary enemies, the Upsarokas, or Crows, had been discovered by him while hunting. He had just shot at a deer when they came in sight. Whether he had been discovered or not he could not say, but thought it probable he had been. Just at this point the remainder of the party returned with the additional information that they had been seen, and that the Crows had halted for a consultation, they having discovered the trail of the Blackfeet, and that they were fully as strong in numbers, and were upon the war-path.

A battle was now inevitable, and the Blackfeet were nothing loth to gain a few scalps, to say nothing of the pleasure of defeating the cowardly (as they contemptuously termed them) Crows, by risking their own lives; and discarding all unnecessary trappings, awaited the appearance of the enemy. The two captives were placed near the insensible form of the war-chief, who lay half-reclining against the moss-covered trunk of a gigantic oak tree. A half-dozen braves were stationed around him as a guard.

They were not kept long in suspense, for the Crows soon hove in sight, and rode swiftly to within a couple of hundred yards of the timber, when the main body paused, while a half-score of the younger and rasher braves kept on until about half-way between the two parties, then taunted the Blackfoot *women*, daring them out from their cover. This was more than their blood could brook, and a squad spurred forth burning to chastise the presumptuous braggarts who, however, did not appear much in awe of them, but met them fairly hand to hand, after several saddles had been emptied on both sides by the preparatory flights of arrows and rifle-balls. The conflict had scarcely begun when the main body of the Crows

dashed forward, sounding their war-whoop, which was re-echoed with interest as the Blackfeet advanced in their turn, and then the battle raged right savagely.

For ~~the~~ time neither party appeared to have the advantage, but each stubbornly maintained their ground. After the first volley the rifles were cast aside as useless, but bows and arrows were still in requisition and inflicted considerable damage on either side. Then they came to still closer quarters and spear-thrusts were exchanged; blows from tomahawks and knife-thrusts were met with like compliments. The clash of steel, wild yells of victory, the trampling and neighing of steeds, who appeared as excited and eager for battle as their masters, together with the ever-shifting tableau, formed a scene worthy of Pandemonium. Then slowly, but surely, the Crows press back their enemies, who fought manfully the while. Perhaps they were overmatched, perhaps it was merely a ruse, for all at once, as with one accord, they turned and spurred back to the woods. The Upsarokas appeared startled for a moment, but then rushed forward with yells and cries of victory. But the pause, though momentary, had given their enemies the advantage they desired, and as they reached the cover, turned and delivered a shower of arrows into the closely-packed bodies of Crows with telling effect. Nothing daunted, however, the Crows leaped from their horses, and closed in a hand-to-hand conflict.

This was not what the Kainnas desired or expected, for they thought to check their foes, and thus have them at a disadvantage. But flushed with triumph the Crows would not gratify them, and they again met upon equal grounds. The Blackfeet were doubly enraged as they noted a few of the Crows dart back and begin scalping their dead and wounded who were lying upon the battle-ground, as they had fallen. This was an unlooked-for blow, but doubtless the men who inflicted it thought best to make sure of the trophies while they could. But it acted as a spur upon a wearied horse, and the Blackfeet fought with still greater ferocity if such a thing could be. When the cunning Crows returned they were singled out with deadly hate, and it is more than doubtful whether they profited much by their act.

And now our heroine, Josie Pinger, was called upon to per-

form an important part in this dread drama of life and death, and most creditably did she acquit herself in a part so foreign to her woman's nature. The woods were comparatively free from underbrush and the fight had spread over a considerable space of ground, so that the group under the tree were somewhat exposed. During the momentary reverse, experienced by their comrades, the guards appointed to watch over the safety of their wounded chief were led from their charge by the exhilarating sounds of war, and they dashed into the midst of the fray.

As may be supposed the women watched its progress with an absorbing interest, mingled with great fear. They did not know how it would end, and had not much choice between the two parties. The fray now receded, and they were somewhat relieved at the cessation of the deadly missiles that often hurtled in close proximity to their position. But this was short-lived, for Josie beheld a huge, stalwart Crow brave dart toward the tree, beneath which Three Fingers was lying, still unconscious. Whether he knew who it was, or whether he thought it better to take a scalp from a foe past resistance, than have to fight for it, is not known, but he darted forward and stooped over the chieftain, grasping his long scalp-lock with one hand while the other brandished a blood-stained knife. Josie uttered a piercing scream that attracted the Crow's attention, and made his eyes glisten, probably with joy, as he thought what nice fringe the silky tresses of the girl would make for his leggins or moccasins.

Josie started back at his fiery glance, and as she did so her hand struck against something hard in her pocket. It was a little revolver her father had given her, "to protect her from the Indians," as he laughingly remarked, little thinking how soon his words would be tested. She had entirely forgotten its existence, and luckily for her it had not been discovered by her captors. She drew it, and pointing toward the Crow, whose attention was again turned toward the foe beneath him, tremblingly pulled the trigger. Providence may have directed the bullet, for she thought not of taking aim, and even shut her eyes as she closed her finger, but at the report the Crow uttered a wild yell of pain as he clapped his hand to his shattered jaw. He was badly hurt, but not so greatly as to en-

tirely disable him, when, luckily for our story—which else would have been abruptly cut short at this point—her cry had been heard, and two of the recreant guards sped to her rescue in time to put a final end to the scalping exploits of that Crow. They saw at a glance how their chief had been saved, as Josie still held the leveled revolver, while the smoke curled from the discharged chamber. In fact she was nearly petrified at her boldness, at what she had done. The guard did not again desert their post, after the lesson they had been taught.

It was evident from the exultant yells of the Blackfeet, and the stubborn silence with which their enemies fought, that the tide had changed. And then, after one last, desperate effort to retrieve their fortunes, the Crows turned and fled, seizing the first horses they could lay their hands upon without regard to proprietorship, closely and unrelentingly pursued by the victorious Blackfeet, who slaughtered them without mercy, whenever an opportunity was offered.

It was nearly night when the last Kainna returned, and they concluded to remain where they were until morning, as they knew the enemy were too completely defeated to renew the attack. After the natural rejoicings had somewhat subsided, the story of how Josie had saved the life, and consequently scalp, of their chief was told, and listened to with wonder and interest. The present chief stood before her and spoke as follows, in his own dialect:

“Daughter of the pale-faces! The warriors of the Kainna-Blackfeet know what you have done, and they thank you. The scalp of Warakola is too good to hang in the lodge of the cowardly Upsaroka. It belongs to a great warrior. The ‘Dark Hair’ was brave, and it still covers the head of a chief. She is brave and deserves to share the lodge of a chief. She shall not work with the squaws; she shall do nothing but sit in the wigwam, and become the mother of many great braves. She will be the squaw of Warakola, if the Great Manitou will that he lives. But should he not live, then she shall keep the fire of Ponetah” (here he struck his breast a resounding blow, and an attitude at the same time,) “burning. Wagh, I have spoken!”

Of course Josie was entirely ignorant of the meaning of

this speech, but the dusky orator heeded not that, and took his seat with the air of one perfectly satisfied with himself, that was not lessened by the general murmur of approval that ran around the crowd of dusky listeners. "Little Birdy" was a little surprised and alarmed at the chief's speech, as she did not know whether he was praising or scolding her for what she had done. But when her bewildered senses were again calmed, a very slight, tiny thrill of pride ran over her, as she fully realized what a heroic act she had performed. And quickly following came the thought of what Basil Croteau would think, did he ever learn of it, which somehow she wished he would. Not that she cared any thing for him—far from it; and then she scornfully spurned the pleasant, manly image from her mind's eye.

But then she remembered where she was, and how doubtful whether they would again meet, and when she thought of her dear father, and his possible fate, she bowed her head and wept bitterly. Ponetah, who was still sitting cross-legged, indulging in the pleasure of a soothing smoke after the toils and turmoils of the day, and stolidly staring at Josie, did not appear to relish this new turn, and with a grunt of disapproval changed his position for one more remote.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD HANK'S "YARN."

WHEN the day dawned, our two friends, Hank and Basil, were far from the grove in which the body of the murdered unknown had been buried, and within a few miles of the spot where the divided trail had misled them. Both horses and riders were weary and jaded with the toil they had undergone, but still they pressed on, wishing to reach the stream in the *motte*, where they could rest with comfort.

"Wal, boy," quoth Hank, "we're e'ena'most thar an' I fer one ain't noways sorry. I tell *ye*, a bite an' sup wouldn't go bad now."

"You're right, Hank, for I am nearly worn out. But when we get there, what do you intend to do? Will you be able to follow the trail after the time we have lost?"

"Yas, I kin foller it, 'less they're a heap smarter'n I think they be. But thar ain't no need o' *thet*, as I knows on. I know jist whar they'll fetch up, an' I kin go custrut thar. But to be on the safe side we'll foller it a bit, an' ef the trai crosses the Muddy whar I think it will, then they're holed fer sure.

"Where's that?" queried Basil.

"I'll show ye. But fust we've got to gin the animiles a good, long rest, 'cause we may hev to make a run fer it, an' need to be in good trim lest they'll raise our ha'r."

"That was a sad affair," added Basil, after a slight silence. "If we hadn't taken the wrong trail it wouldn't have happened, and that poor girl would have been alive now."

"'Twas a big mistake sure enough, but it's all fer the best. Thar's somethin', lad, thet's *wusser'n* death, an' thet's what'd 'a' happined to the gal ef she'd 'a' lived. Yas, she's fur better off now, pore child!" added the scout, with a sigh for the ill-fated stranger, and then they rode onward in silence.

In a short time the *motte* was reached, and after a cautious and thoughtful examination, they entered it and speedily turned their wearied steeds loose to graze, while they made preparations for their simple meal. They did not dare kindle a fire, lest the smoke should betray their whereabouts to any chance enemy, and were forced to content themselves with dried buffalo-meat and cold corn bread, with which their haversacks had been plentifully supplied when leaving the wagon-train. This dispatched, they lighted their never-failing pipes, and reclined at length upon the grassy sward, keeping an eye upon the horses, to see that they did not stray from the cover of the trees. After a time, Basil spoke.

"You say that you know this Three Fingers well, and had a fight with him once. How did it happen?"

"Yas, I guess I do know the old rascalion, jest a leetle: wagh!" replied Triplett, with a deep scowl upon his naturally good-humored face, as he knocked the ashes from his red-clay pipe, and refilled it. Then obtaining a light from Basil's pipe he continued: "I did hev a leetle turn-up wi' him onc't, an'

I got the better o' him too, an' he kerries my marks yit as ye know. 'The how on it war in this way :

"A matter o' fifteen y'ar ago, mebbe a leetle more or a leetle less, I war trappin' up on Rond river, as runs through the Gran' Rond, ye know, clus to the mouth o' "Jump-off-Joe" crick. 'Twas a nout o' the way place then, an' I on'y chained on it by accident, but as the beaver an' minks an' other fur war so tame and plenty, I made up my mind to spend the season thar, 'stead o' goin' up to my ole trampin' grounds. I had to keep mighty shady, an' be as cunnin' an' wide-awake as a 'fisher,' an' hit, I opine, is jest the cutest animile thet w'ars fur.

"Wal, I hed mighty good luck, traps full every night, an' I was in high glee, a-thinkin' what a high ole 'blow-out' I'd hev when cole weather come, an' I got back to the fort. Ye see I hed my animiles—a horse an' two mules—*cached* in a cave, but it war so damp thet I didn't like to sleep thar mysel'; so I hunted around until I found the cutest kiver ye ever see'd. It war a holler sycamore tree wi' the bushes an' vines a-growin' thick all aroun' it, an' on'y I see'd a b'ar sneak in, I don't b'lieve as how I'd a-found it. I killed ole b'ar, an' moved inter my new wigwam. It war holler an' big enough fer half a dozen men. The top war broken off, an' a hole big as yer head would let out the smoke. 'Twar snug; 'sides I could keep my pelts dry.

"One day I was takin' a leetle bit o' tramp, allays on the look-out fer reds, as war thick as lice in a Digger, when I heerd the tramp o' hosses' feet on the other side o' the river, a-comin' mighty lively. I *cached* and lay low to see who it war, ready to hunt my hole fer I didn't want to be diskivered jest then as ye may 'magine. In a few moments a red rode down the bank an' stopped to let his horse drink. Jest ahint him war two more, an' one o' them held a white woman afore him on the hoss's withers. I could see as her hands an' feet war tied, wi' a belt over her mouth to keep her from hollerin'.

"Lord, how mad I war then, an' I swored to save her, else go under myself. So I touched up the primin' in ole purty, hyar," patting the weather-beaten stock of his rifle affectionately as he spoke, "an' felt ef my butcher an' pups war all

right. I didn't mind the odds ; thar war on'y three as I could see, an' I'd pulled through wi' wusser 'n thet.

"Wal, they crossed an' landed a leetle below whar I war 'bushed, an' I up an' let the imp as held the gal hev it plum' center. In course he dropped, an' she wi' 'im, fer she war so tied thet she couldn't help herself. T'other two war s'prised a few, an' afore they could do any thin' I guv one a pill from one o' the pups as tumbled him over. The last red he made fer the gal, an' I made fer him, but when he see'd I's alone, turned an' met me, fa'r fer an Injun. He gin me a arrer in the shoulder, an' then I knocked him off his animile wi' my rifle. Jest then, the second Injun I shot rolled over to'rds the gal who war tryin' to git up, an' I see'd the knife in his han'. He war too fur fer me to reach him afore he could wipe her out, so I pulled at him wi' the other pup.

"I hit him fa'r enough, but not in time to save her, fer he jabbed her twic't wi' his knife afore he keeled over. I made fer him, givin' a jump thet jest saved my ha'r, fer as I did so, the last red made a hit at me from behind thet would hev played me, but as 'twas, the blade on'y slit open the hide 'tween my shoulders fer n'arly a feet. It smarted like sixty, an' I half turned as he grabbed me an' tried ag'in. I dodged it, but stumbled an' fell, drawin' him down on top o' me. I grabbed him around the arm so's he couldn't use his sticker, an' I tried to turn him. But he war wide awake, an' slipped one arm loose an' grupp'd me by the throat. Then we had it hot and heavy, now I tell you.

"I warn't no kitten as you may guess, but he war a good match fer me, 'sides havin' the 'vantage. We rolled over an' over, fust one on top, then t'other. I war holdin' his knife-hand tight, he war afeard to let go my throat to loosen it, fer fear I'd git the better o' him, an' so we war. I war a-growin' kind o' weak an' fainty-like, he squose so hard, but I managed at last to kick the knife outen his han'. Then I grupp'd him by the skulp-lock, as he clutched my gullet wi' both han's, an' windin' it roun' my finger, stuck my thumb into his eye, an' gouged like all git eout !

"Mebbe he didn't grunt then, oh no, not at all ! An' then he let go my throat an' bent back my thumb. But I'd got the 'vantage an' me'nt to keep it. Jest then I heerd a yell

an' see'd a tarnal lot o' Blackfeet ride into the river, a spur-rin' like the devil war arter 'em. I knowed I must work quick, else I war a goner, shore. I jerked the imp back'ards by his top-knot an' drawed my butcher. He see'd it an' grabbed hold o' it with his bare han'. I pulled it loose with a swipe that tuck off two o' his fingers clean, then gin him a jab in the bread-basket thet keeled him over. Then I tried to raise his ha'r, but afore I cut cl'ar round some o' the reds fired an' a bullet broke my right arm, an' another tuck me in the side. So I see'd I'd better make tracks fer my hoss ef I wanted to save my bacon, fer the red devils war clus to shore an' a-comin' like blazes.

"I grabbed my rifle in my left hand an' made fer the cave, got thar fust, though not much, mounted an' split like fun. 'Twar a clus shave, darned clus, an' the arrers an' bullets war a-whistlin' around lively, now I tell ye. But I got cl'ar arter a long chase, an' when I'd throwed 'em off o' the trail, I *cached* 'mong the hills 'til my hurts got well.

"Then I moseyed fer the ole camp, an' when I got thar, I found they'd cleaned me out! Lord, how mad I war. I jest got down, an' leanin' ag'in' thet ole sycamore, throwed off my hat an' cussed a blue streak. Yas, sir, I cussed till the trees n'arly shuck off all thar leaves, an' the winds fa'rly smelled o' sulphur an' brimstone! Then I felt better, an' tuck the trail arter 'em, fer I dassent go back to the fort 'thout any thin' to show fer the trip, an' muleys thet I'd tuck out, fer ef I did the boys would hev laughed me off the place. So I sneaked around until I got a kupple o' skulps afore I left.

"An' that's the way the Blackfoot chief got the name the whites know him by—Ole Three Fingers," concluded Hank.

"But the white woman—what of her?" inquired Croteau.

"Oh, I see all thet the wolves hed left o' her—a wheen o' bones, an' dug a hole an' kivered 'em up. The reds had buried the twoimps thet I'd wiped out, but I soon found the place, an' to pay 'em fer usin' the poor gal so, I onkivered 'em so thar brothers, the coyotes, would find 'em too, arter raisin' thar ha'r. I never found out who she war, or how themimps got her; or why the three reds war so fur ahead o' the rest. I s'pose they's goin to camp, an' not thinkin' o' seein' enemies, rode on sort o' keerless like," added Triplett.

After a spell he resumed :

"Say, lad, hain't you sleepy? Better take a snooze fer awhile so's to be all hunky fer work when the time comes."

"I can't sleep now. You lie down and I'll watch," replied Basil.

"Wal, guess I mought as well. Wake me in a kuppel o' hours, an' be sure an' keep good watch all around ye," and the guide closing his eyes resigned himself to sleep, which visited him almost instantly.

Basil did not neglect the caution given by Triplett, but this did not prevent dark and painful forebodings from filling his heart with gloom, as he reflected upon the unknown fate of the maiden he loved so dearly, and thought of what pain and tortures she must have undergone, both bodily and mentally, since being torn from those who were all she had to love upon earth. He strove in vain to banish the bitter fancies, but they returned with renewed force, until he groaned aloud from excess of agony. Then the events of the past night were lived over in memory, and he recalled with a cold shudder the horrible sensation of grief, woe and despair that had darkened his heart, when he believed he held the dead form of his murdered love in his arms. And he groaned again as he thought perchance the sad fate of the unknown might yet be hers, even if it had not yet befallen her. And he tried to picture what life would be without her, and he vowed in his heart that *her* fate should be *his*.

Very foolish and ridiculous, no doubt, gentle reader, but his plea must be—*he loved*.

Nothing occurred during the succeeding several hours, and Basil, who was so deeply absorbed in his reverie, although not neglecting his duty, was greatly surprised when the guide reproached him for allowing him to oversleep his appointed time. It was with difficulty that he could be convinced that so long a time had elapsed, until he glanced at the sun now bordering on the horizon. Then he stretched himself upon the spot vacated by Hank, and a very few minutes more brought the stertorous breathing commonly termed snoring to the watchful ears of the scout, who smiled as he heard it.

The next uprising of the sun witnessed them upon the trail of the Indians. As soon as the ford was reached, and Trip-

lett's prediction verified, the two scouts left the trail and struck off over the prairie, relying upon the worthy guide's intimate knowledge of these almost trackless wilds, to bring them speedily and safely to their destination. It would be useless and tiresome to both the reader and ourselves, to trail their course step by step. Let it suffice that his judgment was not at fault, and that in the due course of time the Black-foot village was discovered.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACKFEET AT HOME.

EARLY on the morning succeeding their fight with the Upsarokas, or Crows, the Blackfeet filed out from the belt of timber, and rode slowly over the prairies. A few hours travel would carry them to their village, and they did not appear in any great haste to reach it. To be sure they had gained a signal victory over their hereditary foes, and had taken nearly two scalps for every one they had lost during the fight ; but their loss had been far more severe during the struggle with the whites, and they had but two scalps to show as an offset against the havoc made by the emigrants' deadly rifles and strong arms. They well knew the scene of grief and wailing their return would occasion, and dreaded it accordingly.

A band of braves, headed by Ponetah, was in the lead, followed by the litter containing the senseless war-chief, behind which rode the two captives, who were treated with increased consideration, since Josie saved the life of Warakola. Then came another troop of warriors, riding slightly in advance of a strange, unearthly band. This consisted of three ranks, each one containing seven horsemen. There was a marked difference in the style of riding of the latter and those preceding them. They did not sit with the careless grace of their leaders, but erect and stiff. The reason was plain, their legs were tied beneath their horses' bellies, and secured with thongs of deer-skin, while braces of the same material supported them

in front and rear. A blanket was thrown over the body of each, that concealed the upper portion of their persons. The head of each drooped upon his breast, while their arms were pinioned to their sides. A lasso was passed from bit to bit, of their horses, thus connecting those in each row, and preventing them from straggling.

One of the mustangs stumbles, and the blanket drops from its rider's head; the sunshine falls upon it; the cherished scalp-lock is missing, the crown covered with gore; the horses bear a breathless, inanimate burden. The riders are those who were killed in the late conflict. The blanket is replaced, and the cavalcade slowly moves along.

The procession reaches the long range of hills, and enters a narrow defile, where only two horsemen can ride abreast. The hills are very irregular, now low and gently sloping, anon tall and towering far above their heads, with occasionally a rocky precipice upon either hand. Scrubby pines and cedar dot their faces, while innumerable parasitic plants send their clinging sprays over its rugged surface.

But the party winding along the valley do not note these. The Indians are accustomed to them; the captives are too despondent. At length they follow the trail over a hill, and the Blackfoot village is in sight, yet a mile distant.

It was upon the broad, level top of a hill, whose summit was nearly round, and apparently half a mile in diameter. This was thickly studded with huts, or wigwams, of hide, while the forms of men, women and children could be distinguished moving from place to place, or carelessly reclining upon the ground. A considerable-sized stream ran along the base of this "table mound," thickly bordered with trees and undergrowth, so that only an occasional glimpse of the silvery waters could be seen. The top of the hill was free from trees, with the exception of three enormous ones that stood near the center. Beneath their sheltering limbs, were two tents, evidently of canvas, much larger than those surrounding them. One was the council-lodge, the other the home of Warakola.

Such was the head village of that section of the Blackfeet known as Kainnas, or "Bloody Men,"—the most warlike and cunning of the three grand divisions composing the tribe. Wara-

kola, or Three Fingers, was the head, or war-chief, of their band. Ponetah was next in command.

The returning war-party paused, and, at a sign from Ponetah, uttered, as with one voice, the wild, thrilling "scalp-halloo," then, as the answering shout came faintly upon the air over the intervening space, the long, mournful death-wail was given. There was no answer to this, and as the band again proceeded, a crowd of women were seen wildly spurring along the several winding paths that led down the steep hillside, and in a few minutes joined the former. Not a word was spoken by either party as the new-comers spread upon either side, allowing the others to pass them, and then falling in at the rear, silently proceeded toward the village. Whatever their feelings might be, they did not allow them utterance until the village, or town, was reached. But although apparently phlegmatic, their eyes stared keenly over the band, as though comparing their number and condition with their appearance when they sallied out on the war-path. That it was not a favorable comparison, was easily divined from their sullen, gloomy looks.

The hill was at length surmounted, and the band halted for a few minutes, while Ponetah, followed by the litter bearing the wounded war-chief, proceeded slowly onward, until the smaller of the two canvas tents was reached, when the body was conveyed within. The form of a woman, whose pale skin, though deeply tanned from exposure, proclaimed her to be of white descent, pressed closely after them.

He soon reappeared, and stalking through the braves, squaws and papposes that closely environed the war-party, motioned the warriors who guarded the captives to follow with them, and led the way to his own wigwam, where they were helped from their horses. Ponetah entered first, and uttered a few harsh commands to a middle-aged squaw, who was cooking in one corner of the hut. She did not reply, but placing a pile of furs and skins so as to form a comfortable seat, motioned the captives to occupy them, a permission they were in no wise loth to avail themselves of, being terribly worn and exhausted by the long and arduous journey they were forced to make. For a time they were silent, watching the motions of their dusky guardian as she performed her rude culinary operations, grumbling in a monotone as she did so. Evidently our

friends were not regarded in the most favorable light, and she did not relish the task her lord and master had set her. But when the venison steaks were done, and the huge pot of hominy sufficiently cooked, they were placed before her guests, and with a sullen gesture she invited them to eat. Despite their grief and unique position, the ladies were very hungry and did ample justice to the rude but palatable food before them.

Meanwhile Ponetah had called a council composed of the principal braves and chiefs of the Kainnas, where he related the exploits of the war-party since it first set out, winding up with a gorgeous, highly-colored description of the defeat of the "Upsaroka squaws," enumerating the number of scalps taken, and how Josie had saved the life of Warakola, as he lay helpless and unconscious beneath the scalping-knife of the Crow. He succeeded so well that the two pale-faced squaws were proclaimed to be guests, not captives, and allowed their liberty in a partial degree until the recovery of Three Fingers, who was now under the care of their great medicine-man, the conjurer. Should he *not* recover, however, they must be at the disposal of Ponetah, to be his squaws, or held for ransom, as he might deem best.

On the whole, the grim old heathen had good cause for congratulation, and when it is remembered, in addition to this fact, that in case of Warakola's death, the mantle long borne by him would drop undisputed upon *his* broad shoulders, it will not be wondered at that Ponetah should naturally wish that the wound inflicted by the scout's bullet would prove fatal. But he was a good dissembler, and allowed not a trace of these thoughts to appear either upon his face or in his actions.

Neary two weeks had now elapsed since the arrival at the Blackfoot village, and the burial ceremonies, together with the rejoicings over the numerous scalps, were over. The captives were not treated harshly, but were allowed to ramble for short distances around the town. They were always watched, however, either by the squaw of Ponetah, or else the Indianized white woman they had seen enter after the wounded war-chief. This, they learned, was the wife of Warakola, the sole one at present; and one day she appeared so much rejoiced

at something, that Josie called her to where they were sitting, resting during one of their daily walks, and began to question her.

She replied, in very broken English, that the war-chief was rapidly recovering, and that he was now sensible, though very weak. It appeared that a portion of the splintered skull had been depressed so that it compressed the brain, but that it had now been removed by the medicine-man, and the patient was out of danger.

"What is your name?" kindly asked Josie, who wished to make friends with the woman, who appeared to be good-natured and kind-hearted.

"Name Mintolah; chief he tell me 'Snow Bird,'" replied she, with a pleasant laugh.

"It is a pretty name," said Josie, a little hypocritically, for she thought it just the opposite, but did not deem it best to say so. "Does the chief love you?"

"What fo' ask dat, eh?" a little quickly.

"Because I would have my sister happy. Could Min—Snow Bird be happy if the chief should take another wife to his house? Would she not feel sorry and cry?"

"Don' know. Mebbe so, if chief t'ink her better dan Mintolah. Den odder squaw he die, git kill velly soon!" she said, with a furtive glance in her dark eye. "But Mintolah not be mad when Warakola take 'Dark Hair' to his wigwam. Snow Bird love lilly sister, no git mad wid *her*," and she softly stroked down the velvety cheek of Josie, with her brown, toil-hardened hand.

"What—do you mean me?" cried Josie, indignantly, her face flushing at the thought. "Does he think of *me* as his squaw?"

"Yeh. Why fo' look so mad?" demanded the Snow Bird, angrily. "He t'ink chief not good 'nough, eh? Warakola velly big chief. Nebber eats clickets an' glasshoppels, sage-hens an' glouse, like Upsaroka dogs. He gleat big brave, got plenty scalps, an' cowardly Pawnees an' Crows hides dere heads when dey hear him name!"

Then she continued more quietly:

"Yeh, Kainna chief say Dark Hair make good squaw. Got to go to wigwam bumby. Big plenty fo' nudder one."

"No, Snow Bird, that can never be. The dove does not mate with the hawk. Sooner than that, I would kill myself," cried Josie.

"Big fool den, do dat; 'cause chief want fo' squaw. Mus' go."

"But, Snow Bird, I don't wish to take your place," determined to try the last appeal. "He might love me better than you, and that would break my heart. Won't you help me to run away?"

"What fo' do dat? Den chief he kill me quick; chop head open wid tomahawk. No; Dark Hair mus' stay. If run off, den me tell chief where go. He die den, sartin. Shoot fast when mad, Warakola," returned the woman, then as if wishing to avoid further discussion, withdrew to a little distance, where she could still overlook any movements made by the captives.

Josie was despondent, for she had depended a good deal upon this person's love for her Indian husband, and thought, by arousing her jealousy, to secure her aid in effecting their escape. But now that hope was gone, and burying her head in the spinster's lap, she gave vent to her feelings.

"Don't cry, darling," soothingly said Medora, gently stroking the glossy hair with her hand. "Cheer up, and hope for the best. Perhaps our friends may come in time and rescue us."

"But you heard what she said about that dreadful Indian!" sobbed Josie.

"Yes; but it will be some time before he is well, and they may come before then."

"Why, do you think they—our friends—are following us?" asked the maiden, brightening up at the faint ray of hope thus presented.

"Yes," answered her aunt, her conscience pricking her little, for she had given up all such hope. "You know they tried to rescue us when we were first captured, and of course they would follow on after. Mr. Tripple is a very smart man, and I am sure he will find us. Poor man!" she continued, with a sigh, "how I pity him; he loves me—us, I mean—so dearly!" ending with a faint blush that, however, escaped Josie's attention.

One hand convulsively grasped the spinster's shoulder, and

a tiny finger-tip rested upon her rosy lip, while she cast a side-long glance of fear toward the Snow Bird, who was silently seated upon a stone a few yards distant, and Jose whispered:

"Don't move or speak, aunt ; but listen."

Fortunately the spinster had steady, strong nerves, and did as requested, although she was greatly astonished at the words and actions of her niece.

But we must return to the guide and Basil for the present

CHAPTER X.

QUITE NATURAL UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

As we have stated, the two scouts reached the vicinity of the Blackfoot village, where the two objects of their search were held in captivity, and again Hank found that his surmises were correct, and also the welcome fact that Josie and her aunt were allowed comparative freedom, with only a woman for guard. 'Tis true, that although often out of sight of the town they were never permitted to go so far that one shriek from that woman's lips would fail to bring scores of armed braves, in as many moments, to the rescue.

Hank was sorely troubled to restrain his more rash companion, whenever the form of his loved one was in sight—so near, yet so far—and to keep him within the bounds of prudence, and he even threatened, should Basil act so ridiculously, that he would bind him, and leave him in the cave all day. This acted as a damper upon the lover, for he well knew that Triplett was just the man to execute his threat, and a quarrel with him in the present state of affairs would be worse than folly.

The guide had made several trips under cover of night to the "Lady's Cañon," hoping to find the colonel with a force of whites there, but was as often doomed to disappointment.

The two scouts were forced to observe unusual precautions to avoid discovery, and suffered great hardships from not daring to build a fire to cook the scanty supply of game they were

enabled to snare at night; but were forced to eat it raw. Then the continual outgoings and incoming of the bands of savages kept them in constant suspense, lest their presence should be discovered before they had effected the contemplated rescue.

On one of Hank's trips into the village—of almost nightly occurrence now, for he hoped to liberate the captives, but ever found the guard too vigilant for him—he fortunately found an empty hut, and entering cautiously he discovered to his great joy a store of dried venison and buffalo-meat. Of this he quickly secured a considerable quantity, tying the bundle with his belt, and returned to the cave rejoicing, where Basil was awaiting him in an agony of hope and fear. This was a perfect God-send, and so they considered it, and for the first time in many days the two daring scouts enjoyed a hearty meal, that strengthened their bodies and hearts in due proportion.

During one of his periodical scouts around the village at night, Hank had discovered the herding-place or corral used to secure the stock of the Blackfeet, and by dint of perseverance and great caution, had secured a couple of "States norses," whose shoes were in good order, and after muffling their hoofs with portions cut from his hunting-shirt, succeeded in leading them to the cave. The saddles belonging to himself and Basil he had so altered as to answer for the use of Josie and her aunt.

Anxiously he looked for some tidings from the colonel, for most of the savages had departed upon a grand buffalo-hunt, and by a sudden onslaught he felt assured that the ladies could be rescued, as not more than two-score able-bodied braves were left to guard the town. But in vain.

At length they determined to wait no longer, but to attempt the rescue on the next day, if the captives took their usual walk, and in the place they were generally to be seen. Could they but silence the squaw that guarded them, without her sounding the alarm, the rest they would trust to Providence.

Before daylight they had closely ensconced themselves in a dense clump of bushes that grew over the brink of a small brook that ran from the great spring above, emptying into the creek or river below. Their horses were all ready for a

start, in the cave, some half a mile distant ; and they awaited the appearance of the ladies with feelings that would be hard indeed to depict.

And now to resume the thread of our story at the point where we paused to trace the course of the two scouts.

" Watch closely that clump of bushes yonder, on the other side of the brook. Twice a little pebble was thrown from there, and then I saw the bushes move. There is no wind, so— There !" she hastily continued, as a tiny pebble fell at their feet, " it is again. Oh, if our friends are indeed near !" and she cautiously fluttered a handkerchief before her, in such a manner that it was hidden from the view of the woman who acted as their guard.

As if in answer to this a hand was partially exposed, that was undoubtedly that of a white man. Only for a moment, then it was withdrawn ; as the women whispered at the same time, " Basil !" " Mr. Tripple !" then bent their eyes once more upon the bushes.

Another missile now swept through the air, but being flat, a gust of wind caught it and bore it to one side. Josie immediately arose, and with a well-counterfeited yawn and stretching of her arms, slowly sauntered toward it. When one foot was between the object and Snow Bird, who was jealously watching her actions, she stooped as if to refasten her shoe, and secured the messenger—a piece of bark ; then turning, she sat down by the spinster. Eagerly they read the words rudely scratched upon it, evidently with the point of a knife, upon its smooth surface :

" Be cautious. Friends are near. Contrive to have the squaw pass by this clump of bushes. Then you are safe.
BASIL."

They had scarcely mastered the words when the hand of Mintolah was placed upon Josie's shoulder, and she said sternly :

" What got dere ? Gib me !"

But the maiden, although terribly alarmed, did not lose her presence of mind, and cast the bark into the swiftly-flowing brook. Mintolah saw it and darted forward, and stooping secured it just as it was passing the bushes. But before she could arise, a dark figure leaped over the stream and a brawny

hand clenched her throat, while the other was pressed tightly over her mouth. Dragging her into the bushes, the guide rapidly proceeded to secure her beyond all possibility of giving the alarm. Wrapping a round stone nearly the size of a hen's egg in his large handkerchief, he thrust it into her mouth and tied the ends together behind her neck. Then he bound her hand and foot to the stems of some of the larger bushes with cords that he had prepared at the cave for that purpose.

During this time, Basil of course had not been idle, but proceeded at once to meet the ladies and assist them to cover, where they would be beyond reach of observation. It was really worthy of note what a cipher Miss Medora found herself in this meeting, and it is no wonder that she found herself close by the side of "dear Mr. Tripple" some moments before the younger couple did.

In fact, the meeting between our hero and heroine was surprisingly cordial, when we recall the rather stately terms they stood upon when last together. Basil, in his ardor, was rather *taking* to say the least, for he clasped Josie tightly in his arms, and then—by the laws of *mutual attraction*, we presume—kissed her repeatedly before he regained his senses. And strange to say, the blushing Josie did not resist in the least, or turn her head away until Basil set her down by the trio in the bushes. Of course she had a satisfactory explanation ready whenever the subject was broached, but we frankly own that we are puzzled, and vow, from this moment, never to attempt in any case to explain the true reasons for young people's actions, especially when they are in love. It can not be done.

After the Snow Bird was securely bound, the quartette, under guidance of Hank, stealthily proceeded toward the cave, for they knew that the fact of the rescue would soon be discovered, and as a long, dangerous road lay before them, every moment was of incalculable value. But although he necessarily proceeded slow, Hank still found it necessary to frequently admonish the young couple to hasten their steps. He did not need any such course with Medora; perhaps he would have been better pleased had such been the case, for she nearly trod upon his heels every time they were lifted, holding fast in the mean time to the dilapidated flap of his

hunting-shirt. Then, for the first time, he learned what a *clinging*, affectionate nature some women have.

In a short time the cave was reached, and after a warm but hasty greeting from "Little Birdy," the guide sallied out to see if the coast was clear for the commencement of their long, wearisome home journey. His heart was light, for the most difficult portion of his vow was accomplished—that of the finding and liberation of the captives—and he felt strong hopes of their ultimate safety. And then the eager, affectionate kiss of the bright little being, who was nearer and dearer to his heart than his precious horse, "Silver Heels," and rifle, was still warm upon his lips. No wonder his heart was light, and that the sunshine from within shone forth from his eyes.

When he returned from his successful survey, he found Miss Medora considerably *dozing* in one corner of the cave, thus allowing the lovers, in the other end, to enjoy their own company without fear of being observed or overheard. Really, an old maid is not such a disagreeable being after all, and from that time Basil always treated the aunt with a great deal more affection and respect than he had heretofore shown her.

The horses were now led out, after every thing had been examined and secured. Their hoofs were all thickly muffled, so as to destroy both the trail and the sound of steel striking upon the hard rock that covered the track they were now to follow. And then, after a short time, the speed was increased, and their hearts leaped as they left the village behind them.

CHAPTER XI.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE little party of whites, after emerging from the hills, instead of following the trail they had traversed when coming to the village, turned to the left, and skirting the hills, quickened their pace to a swift gallop. But they had not advanced a mile when a tremor crept over them. A bitter curse hissed through the tightly-clenched teeth of the guide. Borne upon

the breeze, a long, fierce yell came faintly to their ears. They could not doubt its meaning.

The escape of the captives had been discovered; the trail would soon be found, and then the result would depend solely upon the relative speed and endurance of the horses. How the fact of the rescue had been so speedily learned, they did not know or even think of; their minds were occupied with far more momentous thoughts, of how they should avert the peril that threatened them.

Triplett's gray eye was keenly glancing around to note any particular in the formation of the ground that would advantage them. Then he spurred forward at a still greater speed, closely followed by the anxious trio, and turning a projecting point of the hills, paused, leaped from his horse, and hastily began throwing off the mufflers that somewhat impeded the speed of the animals. Basil followed his example, and then they again sped forward.

The hill on which the village was situated was now hidden behind a still more lofty range, and the blind trail would have to be traced up to this point by their enemies, and by that time the guide trusted to have gained such a start that pursuit would be useless. Then they reached the summit of a slight swell. Again Hank pulled up with a curse.

Not over a mile distant a close body of horsemen was seen, riding rapidly across their path. A glance showed them to be Indians, but from their actions it was evident that the fugitives had not been seen.

Once more the course was changed, and Hank led the way toward the north-east. Then they sped on as before. He was troubled, and despite the words of cheer and encouragement that he uttered, an anxious look overspread his face, that was reproduced upon the faces of those who depended solely upon his skill to extricate them from their perilous situation.

At this point Josie called attention to a cloud of dust that was faintly to be seen directly in their path. The fugitives slightly checked their speed, and with a feeling of despair, awaited the interpretation of the guide as to the character of the cloud. It came all too soon for their sick and painfully throbbing hearts.

"Injun ag'in, by th' Eternal!"

"What is to be done now?" despondently queried Basil.
"We can not remain here."

"In course not, an' we cain't run fer it, nyther. 'Ca'se why, we're surrounded by the red imps. So thar's on'y one thing fer us to do, an' thet is to *cache*, an' wait until night. Foller me as fast as yer hosses kin click it," and he darted off upon the back trail like an arrow fresh from the bow.

In a few minutes they reached the bed of the creek, and proceeded a short distance up it; then the guide told the little party to dismount and await his return. He led the horses across the creek and entered a clump of bushes that grew close to the water's edge. The bank, which was of a considerable height, had been undermined during some freshet, thus forming a good-sized recess. The top was roofed over by the earth, while the bushes in front met it overhead. The floor was of sand and earth that had become dry, and allowed the horses' hoofs to sink deeply, thus rendering their tramping inaudible save to the ears of one in close proximity. Securely tying them, he hastened back to where his companions were awaiting his return in breathless suspense.

Then cautioning them to step lightly, and as nearly in his tracks as possible, led the way over a rocky ledge that ran toward the hills, the faces of which were very rocky and broken. There was a small hill a little in advance of the main body, that resembled a huge heap of *débris*, cast there by gigantic hands. The sides and summit were bare, but around its foot a circle of luxuriant undergrowth flourished. Into a point of this the scout led the way, and then called upon Basil to assist him in pushing upon a boulder that he pointed out. To the latter's surprise he pressed against it as though he would push it *into* the hill. And this was just what the guide intended, for under their united strength the rock slowly slid inward, and soon left an aperture large enough to admit their persons. The guide led the way, and whispered to the others to follow him. When once within, to their surprise they found themselves the occupants of a spacious cavern, the extent of which could be but faintly seen.

Then with some trouble the boulder was slid back into its place, and Hank, feeling around, soon had it securely wedged

in with stones that he found upon the floor. These stones had evidently been fashioned for their purpose, and in answer to Basil, Triplett said that he had often occupied the cave, and during his leisure moments had shaped the "door," as he termed it, and the wedges to hold it in its place; so that nothing short of artillery could force it from its position. But whether it was known to the Blackfeet he of course had no means of knowing.

The cavern was large and comparatively well lighted by numerous chinks and crevices in the rocks that formed the roof and the upper portion of the sides. A tiny rill ran across one end of the apartment, that was cool and pleasant to the taste. The floor was thickly strewn with fine white sand, and from its dryness it was evident that the place was well ventilated and healthy. In one corner was a good-sized pile of dried leaves, grass and moss, that had answered the purpose of a bed. Upon this the two women seated themselves, while Basil and the guide conversed in whispers, by the entrance. There was not much consolation to be gleaned from Triplett, and the young man's heart was heavy within him as he glanced toward Josie, and realized what a dreadful doom awaited her should they be discovered and fall into the hands of the Blackfeet. That they would be discovered Triplett had little doubt, and unless they could slip off under cover of night, their only hope of safety was in the speedy arrival of Colonel Pinger with a rescuing party. He did not greatly fear that their position would be forced, and as for starvation, they were well provided against that, for at least a week, while water was plentiful.

After perhaps a couple of hours passed in this suspense, the guide, who was stationed by the entrance with his ear close to a chink, motioned the others to be perfectly silent. He had heard the low murmur of voices, in eager consultation, approaching the cave. These drew nearer and paused in front of the boulder. Hank had a slight knowledge of the Kainna dialect, and as they conversed, learned that the horses had been discovered, and that it was plain from this fact that the fugitives could not be very far distant—that they could not escape, for the whole country around was being scoured and searched by small bands of braves, and that they had been

sent to examine the cave, which was well known to the tribe.

They were evidently awaiting the approach of others of their party before entering the cave, where they hoped to find the fugitives. Then their hands were placed against the boulder and a sudden push given. But the stone moved not, and they increased the pressure, with the same result. Grunts of surprise and astonishment then arose, plainly showing that they had no knowledge of the wedges or their use.

Hank knew that their discovery was inevitable, and beckoned for Basil to approach, and prepared to give the foe a warm reception. Perhaps he would have been more cautious had he not learned that his precious "Silver Heels" was in the possession of the red-men, grinding his teeth in an ecstasy of rage at the thought. Telling Basil what he contemplated, they leveled their rifles, aiming through the chinks, of which there were several, and each selecting his victim, fired. The wild death-yells and cries of surprise were almost drowned by the long-continued and deafening reverberation that echoed through the cavern, drawing a faint shriek from the lips of the terrified women.

Then came the loud cries of discovery from those near the cave, that was taken up and echoed from every point of the compass, until the air seemed filled with the exultant yells of numberless fiends. A hasty volley was fired through the crevices around the "doorway," but as the two scouts had stepped to one side immediately after firing, and the position of the women being out of range, the bullets were only flattened against the rocky bottom or sides of the cave. Our friends quickly reloaded their rifles, for they knew they would be allowed but little rest, now that the strife had fairly begun.

For a time after the shots, the yells continued at short intervals, as though for the purpose of guiding the more distant Blackfeet to the cave, and then came the constant patter, patter of moccasined feet, and the louder sound of horses' hoofs striking against the rocks. The scouts were stationed one on each side of the entrance, rifles in hand and pistols in readiness by their sides, prepared to make the victory a dear one, should the enemy succeed in forcing their position. The women had been placed where there was no danger of being

struck by any chance shot, and they awaited the result in painful suspense.

Triplett uttered a low hiss, and leveling his rifle, fired, and an Indian, who had unwittingly exposed himself before the guide's loophole, bounded high into the air with the usual horrible shriek. Another volley of rifle-balls pattered against the rock or rattled down from the sides of the cavern, but Hank had withdrawn from danger, and with a low chuckle, muttered:

"So much good powder an' lead throwed away. But didn't he squeal purty; eh, Basil? It makes my old heart jest git up an' dance a raal ole-fashioned b'ar-dance when I hear 'em gin thet sort o' yell. Dog-gone 'em, I could wipe out the last or'nary cuss thet lopes the perraries, with as good a stummick as I'd pick a buffler's rib! I cain't help it. When I git to thinkin' 'bout the infarnal imps, it e'en'most sets my blood afire, an' I on'y see the ole folks as they rubbed out when I's a shaver. An' I guess as how they don't like me overly much more'n I do them, fer I've wiped out gobs on 'em in my time. Wal," he concluded, with a grim sigh, "they've got nobody but tharselves to blame fer it. They made me what I am, an' I consate they hain't overly proud o' the job."

For some time the silence continued. The women began to brighten up and allow hope to reënter their hearts. They thought that the loss the Indians had sustained had disheartened them, and that they had abandoned the strife as fruitless, and returned to the village. But how little did they know the dogged nature of their foes, who at that moment were only thinking how they could most speedily dislodge the troublesome whites and wreak their vengeance upon their bodies! The scouts harbored no such thoughts as these; they were too well versed in border warfare, not to know that the siege had hardly begun, and waited anxiously for what the next moment might bring forth.

Then they heard a confused shuffle of moccasined feet upon the gravel, and caught a glimpse of dusky half-nude forms, as the enemy rushed forward and made a desperate effort to push the boulder from its place. It did not even shake under the powerful force brought to bear upon it. The scouts each singled out their mark from the crowd, and at so short a dis-

tance but one result could follow the discharge of the rifles—and two human beings were numbered among the dead. The survivors beat a hasty retreat, but the pistols were brought into requisition before they could gain cover, and there were wounds to be bandaged when they once more lay low, and deliberated what course to pursue next.

An hour passed away without any further demonstrations, and the scouts filled their pipes and smoked with great gusto ; for, while lying *perdu*, watching for a chance to rescue the captives, they were forced to deny their appetites for fear the odor might betray them to their keen-scented foes. Those who are devotees of the narcotic weed can alone realize the calm, soothing influence of a pipe, or the intense enjoyment our two friends obtained from the fragrant vapor.

They did not dare leave the entrance, for through the apertures their only chance of learning the movements of the enemy lay, as well as inflicting damage upon them. They did not dare think of the future, or how all this was to end ; for what could they do against the scores of bloodthirsty demons without ? The hope that they had entertained of eluding the vigilance of the Blackfeet in the darkness of the coming night, was dispelled by the knowledge that their horses had been discovered by the foe. Of course, it was out of the question to venture upon the long homeward journey upon foot ; they would meet certain death by so doing, as the cave would then be forced sooner or later—as it could only be wedged in from the interior—and then with horses the trail would be quickly followed and—no, that was not to be thought of. Thus their chances dwindled down to the last faint hope that Colonel Pinger would arrive in time with force enough to cope successfully with the Blackfeet, and thus liberate them. But oh, what a slender chance ; and how could they depend upon that ? No, determined Hank, they could only sell their lives as dearly as might be, and go under with colors flying. He mentally vowed that Josie should never again fall into their power ; better death than that. And death it should be, even if he had to enact the merciful executioner ; better that she should perish by the hand of one who loved her, than to live to be the drudge—the slave of some brutal Indian.

These thoughts were passing gloomily through his mind, when he was startled by the report of a rifle, and a bullet passed through his hat and cut deeply into his left shoulder.

"Thunder! whar'd thet come from?" he cried.

He did not need a verbal answer. The report guided him, and looking up, the little cloud of smoke, curling and wreathing among the jagged points of the roof, told him as plainly as words could. It came from one of the small holes in the roof of the cavern. The enemy had scaled the mound and fired a shot with the effect noticed.

A shade of care settled upon the rugged face of the guide at this new danger. He knew that it was one that it would be difficult to guard against. Directing Basil to watch by the entrance, he placed the women in a spot where they were secured from danger. After a careful inspection assured him that no loophole overlooked their position, he proceeded to guard against the sharpshooter, not heeding the pain of his wound or yielding to the entreaties of the spinster to be allowed to bind it up. He had noted the hole through which the shot had been fired, but could see no signs of any one at it. He moved with a swift, zigzag step, to disconcert any attempt at a second aim, should any of the Indians be watching him. As his thoughts grew more collected, he saw that the case was not so desperate as he had at first imagined. He knew that while the interior was in a state of semi-darkness, the eyes of those in the bright sunshine without would require considerable time before they could distinguish forms below with any thing like certainty, or to take any accurate aim. And then, owing to the uneven formation of the holes, it would be difficult to use them as loopholes.

His first action was to collect a number of medium-sized stones and place one upon each spot of sunshine cast by the rays entering at the apertures. Then taking his station, he divided his attention between them and the roof above. Suddenly his gray eye gleamed with an expression of vindictive joy, as he noted one of the stones shrouded in gloom, and softly gliding forward, he stood beneath the darkened hole. He caught sight of a portion of a dusky face outlined in the hole, and, throwing up his long rifle, it spoke before the savage—whose eyes, blinded by the strong contrast the gloom

within presented to the dazzling sunshine without, had not yet fairly distinguished the forms below—could withdraw his head, and the horrible shriek of agony closely followed the report. Then the body was heard to roll over the rocky shale, and fall with a dull, heavy thud upon the ground at the foot of the mound.

When the warrior's death was witnessed by those without, they rushed in a body against the boulder that only kept them from their vengeance, with wild howls of rage and hate. Hank rushed to assist Basil, and the rifle of the latter, accompanied by their pistols, spoke vindictively. Then, as the youth was about to reload, Josie crept to his side and slipped the little revolver, that had stood her in such good stead during the fight between the rival red-men, into his hand, saying :

"It is loaded ; use it !" and darted back before he could utter his surprise.

The Indians appeared mad with rage and fury, and continued their hopeless endeavors with a bravery that deserved a better success, some striving to move the rock, while others returned the fire of the two scouts. But the latter had the advantage in being able to see distinctly the forms of their foes, while their own were invisible. However, they did not escape scathless, for, when the Blackfeet retreated, Basil was bleeding profusely from a severe wound in the face, a rifle-ball having entered his cheek and passed out at his neck, inflicting a very painful but not dangerous wound. Triplett was bleeding from his head and side, but both, upon inspection, proved to be mere flesh wounds.

As they would probably have a breathing-spell after the severe repulse the enemy had received, the women were allowed to wash and bind up the wounds as best they were able.

Josie ever affirmed that when Miss Medora was bandaging the wound in the guide's head, she heard a distinct *smack*, and looking up saw Hank hastily wipe his lips with the back of his hand. And furthermore, declared that it was a kiss, but whether the scout was the offender or the victim, she could not say. The spinster retorted that it was surely the *echo* from the cavern where the young couple were.

For some hours the quietness was unbroken, save by the

low whispering of Josie and Basil, Hank volunteering to keep guard. The sun was nearly down when the guide heard a cautious footstep, and then an armful of brushwood was cast before the entrance of the cave. He well knew what that meant. The Indians were going to try and *smoke them out!* And for a moment his brow clouded, as he felt the cool night-breeze blowing through the crevices. But then as he thought of the numerous holes in the roof, once the cause of danger, now about to be the means of saving them from an agonizing death, he chuckled to himself. He knew that the strong draft would draw the smoke *upward*, and thus leave the atmosphere clear below.

And so it proved, for when the fire was ignited, with such caution that a shot could not be obtained at the incendiary, the smoke rolled in in vast columns, and rising to the roof, escaped through the apertures. When the heat grew so intense as to become unbearable, he tested the wedges, and finding them secure, walked over and sat down near the lovers. For such they were. How the understanding came about, neither could tell; they only knew that it *did*, and they were contented with that fact.

Miss Medora immediately changed her seat for one nearer the guide, who appeared very uneasy at her close proximity. In fact, he would rather face a panther bare-handed, if he had the choice, than endure a *tête-à-tête* with the spinister. Inordinately bashful in the presence of woman, he feared her above all. But he was afforded a good excuse for leaving her, as the yells of rage were again renewed from without.

The savages, who had been congratulating themselves upon how nicely they were "doing" the hated whites, had caught sight of the slender columns of smoke, as they poured from the roof of the cave, and saw that unless these vent-holes were stopped, their plan was useless. And a number of them began scaling the mound, bearing clay and sand to plaster them up.

The scouts saw their danger, and prepared to foil them if possible. At first the savages were too intent upon performing their task, and exposed their bodies to the deadly aim of our friends, who were in nowise backward in improving the chances given them. But after the death of one, and the re-

ceipt of a shattered arm by another of their party, they used more precautions.

One after another of the holes were stopped, and the cavern began to fill with the strong, suffocating vapor. The women began to cough, and even the more powerful lungs of the scouts were oppressed. Seeing that they could inflict no further injury upon the Blackfeet, Triplett looked about to see what hope there was for them to escape the dreadful doom that threatened. The space around the entrance was free from smoke, but the heat was so intense that no advantage could be taken of that fact. Then he noted the brook, or spring. His face brightened, for he saw that there was hope.

The inlet for the water was small, not larger than a man's arm, and appeared to be a passage worn through the solid rock. There was no smoke there. He stooped and placed his head close to it. The air was cool and a strong current of it entered. He knew that they were saved, and communicated his discovery to his companions. They drew near, and kneeling, reveled in long draughts of the pure and delicious air.

There was no need of watching now, for the huge pile of brushwood and logs blocked up the only place of entrance. The savages were in high glee, and danced madly around the hill, uttering their wild whoops and uncouth songs, in their delight at having so nicely outwitted the whites. How quickly their tune would have changed could they have seen the interior of the cavern, and beheld the quartette as they lay with their heads close to the mouth of the outlet, and experiencing no difficulty in breathing, whatever.

Time rolled on, and the sun had long since gone to its rest behind the western hills, when the guide uttered an exclamation. The smoke was gradually dispersing, and it was now possible to breathe while moving about the cave. Hank crept toward the doorway. The fire had burned out, and the Blackfeet were raking the glowing embers away from before the entrance. Basil stole to the side of the guide, and they awaited the next movement of the enemy.

CHAPTER XII.

WHOORAY!

THE Blackfeet appeared to think that the whites had been suffocated, for they did not scruple at exposing themselves before the entrance, as they stood or walked around in the clear moonlight. They were only waiting for the rocks to cool a little before they forced the entrance. Soon a loud shout was heard and a half-score appeared, bearing between them the butt of a pine-tree, that they had improvised into a battering-ram. The scouts look troubled at this new enemy, and prepared for the crisis that was evidently at hand.

Then strong, willing hands grasped the log and dashed forward with it, hurling the squared butt against the boulder. It shook slightly. But immediately the rifles of the white men spoke. A chorus of wild yells of wonder from the Indians. They could not comprehend how the men could have existed so long. Then the contents of the pistols were hurled at them.

The ram was again dashed against the boulder. A wedge crumbles and falls; the rock groaned and quivered. The intense heat had weakened it.

The women crept forward and mutely offered to assist in reloading the weapons. When one is emptied, it is passed in silence to them; a fresh one is immediately placed in the hands of the defenders. Shrieks of agony follow every shot, but still the battering-ram continues its assault. The Indians are like demons; vengeance calls in every tone of their voices, shows in each of their actions. The hills echo with their fiendish yells and howls. They do not heed the death that is all around them. When one of the men falls at the ram, another takes his place. The bodies strew the ground about the entrance. They are rudely pushed aside by the feet of their more fortunate comrades, or used as stepping-stones. The boulder that separates the foes, shakes and gradually gives way before the tremendous force

brought to bear upon it. The two pale, powder-begrimed scouts take steady aim, and not a bullet is wasted. The women, transformed into heroes, swiftly reload the discharged firearms, from the rapidly decreasing store of ammunition before them. A grim smile illumines the visage of the guide. He knows that the victory will be dearly bought by the Blackfeet. Then he laughs—a horrible laugh, as one after another of the besiegers bites the dust.

But hark! A low tramp as of many horses. The Kainnas do not heed it. They are wild—burning with a fierce longing for the blood of their foes within; even while their last chance of safety is being cut off. Their ears are closed, but are destined to be rudely opened—many in the spirit-world.

“Fire, men, and then charge home!” rung in a loud, clear voice, that was partially drowned by a simultaneous discharge of rifles and muskets, followed by a rattle of smaller arms.

Then rose an exultant cheer, and before the bewildered survivors could recover their faculties of mind enough to defend themselves, the horsemen were among them, plying their gleaming steel or clubbed rifles, swung by arms nerved with hate. The occupants of the cavern knew then that they were saved.

“Whooray! whooray, boys! gin it to the copper-skinned varmints! Rub ’em out! Whooray!” yelled Triplett, as he hastily tore out the wedges and slid the boulder from its position.

Then he leaped into the midst of the fray, swinging his long, heavy rifle around his head as if it were a feather, with a power that leveled all before it. At every blow he yelled out some curse or adjuration, or gave vent to his hate in horrible roars. He caught a glimpse of the loved form of his steed “Silver Heels,” and leaped upon his back, without saddle or bridle, and continued the slaughter.

The fleeing savages were followed and hunted down. The still-feeble war-chief fell by the hand of his ancient foe, the guide. The village was fired, and when the sun rose, not a living Kainna was to be seen. The few that escaped wandered far, until they joined the main division of the tribe, the Siksikagas. That spot knew them no more.

But we care not to dwell upon the scene. It was a merciless massacre.

It was night, ensuing the horrible *melée*. The whites had encamped in a grove of trees. Supper was over, and five persons were gathered in a group at the foot of a gigantic oak. Colonel Pinger spoke :

"It was nearly a week after you left us before I was able to begin the journey to the fort. This we reached, and I then assembled all the men and told them the story of the capture, and Triplett's advice. Then I called for volunteers to go with me. There was a company of soldiers under command of a friend of mine, Captain Crandall, and he answered for them. Others came forward, and you see the number I had under my command.

"Then we started, Bob Hurley acting as guide, for the 'Lady's Cañon.' This we finally reached a little after dark last night, and as it is only a short mile from the cave, heard the report of guns quite distinctly. Two of the men volunteered to go forward and learn the cause. They crept near enough to see what was up, and one of them recognized Triplett's horse. Then we knew that you were either captured or besieged, and so I ordered an assault. We arrived just in time, and you know the result," concluded the colonel.

"And now, my friends," he added, turning to the two scouts, "how can I thank you for what you have done?—how reward you?"

"Don't talk to me about thanks or rewards," quoth Triplett; "but I 'spect the lad yonder wants sunthin'. Fer me, leetle birdy hyar is safe, an' I'll jest call it squar' ef she'll on'y give rough ole Hank Triplett one kiss."

"A thousand, if you wish them!" cried Josie, winding her arms around his neck. "Dear old uncle!"

"Say that ag'in, birdy, say it ag'in," exclaimed the guide, in a choked tone, as he folded the little darling closely within his great arms, while the spinster, sitting near, heaved a deep sigh, looking very envious.

"And you, Basil," continued the colonel, "if there is any favor I can do for you, do not hesitate for a moment in asking it; I can refuse you nothing."

"I wish I could think so, sir; but the boon I crave is so great and precious that I fear you will deem me presumptuous," rising, and gently taking one of Josie's hands, leading her to her father. "It is that you will call me son," he added, bowing his head.

"Well, well!" fairly snorted the astounded father, with a half-puzzled, half-indignant look.

Miss Medora slid over to the side of the guide, placing her mouth close to his ear, and whispered, in an affectionate, cooing tone:

"Dear Mr. Tripple, hain't you got nothing to ask of him?" with a very suggestive squeeze of the hand.

"Oh Lord, is the woman crazy? Darned ef she won't marry me arter all, whether I want to or not!" and he glided from her grasp, looking at her with more fear than he would feel to face a grizzly bear.

"Well, well! Mr. Croteau, your proposal is so very sudden and unexpected that I must defer my reply for a time. I must consult my daughter, and I wish to have consultation with you also," quoth the colonel.

We will not follow, step by step, the homeward journey of the victorious party. It was not uninteresting or free from perils and dangers; but all these were happily overcome. During this time the colonel had learned the real state of his daughter's affections, and upon conferring with Basil, the latter satisfied him that he was in every respect a suitable match for Josie, and at last he gave his consent.

Hank was the only one of all our characters who was not perfectly happy, unless, indeed, we except Miss Medora. The latter followed him wherever he might turn, showing so plainly the state of *her* affections, that only the respect felt for the colonel and his daughter prevented her from becoming the general object of ridicule. As it was, more than one hearty laugh was had by the borderers at her expense. Her brother and niece remonstrated with her, but a minute after she was as bad as ever. There was but one thing that prevented the guide from running away in the dead of night. He could not leave his "leetle birdy" so soon. Thus matters stood when they reached the fort.

CHAPTER XIII

OF COURSE.

GENTLE readers, I am authorized to invite you, one and all, to attend the wedding to-night, and participate in the pleasures and gayeties thereof.

It is a still, cold night, and as we have to walk from one end of the town to the other, you will need your wraps; and as we go, I will tell you all I know about the wedding. Ready? Then come on.

Ugh! how the wind whistles around the corner! It almost takes my breath. Ain't it lucky the snow is frozen?—for if it were not, then good-by to all the pleasant sleigh-rides we have planned, for a time at least, it would drift so. How the moon and stars shine, don't they? Oh yes, about the wedding—I forgot.

Well, you remember where we left the happy party, at the fort, after the rescue; and that the colonel had given his consent. As he was not very well pleased with life on the border, and was growing old, he resigned his commission, and settled here in Ireton. Basil at length managed to have the day fixed for Christmas eve—Josie would not consent to an earlier—and great preparations have been made.

But here we are, at the gate, and go up the gravel walk to the door. The great elm trees that stand on either side of the door are leafless, and the wind whistles mournfully through the gnarled and tangled boughs. The once gay and brilliant flower-beds are covered with a mantle of snow; the shrubbery is leafless and bare, save here and there a sturdy pine. But the house makes ample amends for that, so gay and pleasant. The windows are all illuminated, and through the unclosed shutters we can see the huge fireplace all aglow with the great heap of blazing hickory logs. But it is entirely too cold to stand here long, so we enter the house.

We put on our mantle of invisibility and proceed at once to the "best room," where there is a goodly company already

assembled, if we may judge from the gay bursts of laughter that meet our ears. The portraits of Colonel Pinger and his daughter Josie hang over the mantle-piece, and numerous engravings adorn the walls. The room is papered—we are “out west,” remember—and a real “boughten” carpet is upon the floor. There are “Hindoo chairs,” too, that are a great wonder to the natives, who seem to doubt their stability, to judge from the cautious, deliberate manner in which they sit down upon them for the first time. In one corner is a piano, which is a great object of interest. Hezekiah Simpson, who once heard it, told a group of his cronies that “they hed jest orter see’d how Miss Josie pulled the music outen thet shiny box. It was a heap better’n fiddlin’ an’ jewsharpin’, *I* tell ye!”

So there was a general desire to “hear the thing go,” and Josie is just seating herself at the piano as we enter. After a short prelude, she began that soul-stirring song, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and as she came to the chorus, Basil joins in and the room is filled with melody.

The bride has not changed much since we saw her last. There is the same fairy-like form, the dark, merry-looking eyes, the short, jetty, clustering curls, the tempting lips and small, even teeth, white as pearls, the beautiful hand—in fine, she was—Josie Pinger.

But there is another old acquaintance of ours, over in that corner, where she has her cavalier, Mr. Hank Triplett, securely penned up, and seems in readiness to intercept the unlucky wight should he attempt the flight he is evidently meditating—Miss Medora Pinger; surely you haven’t forgotten her. If you look, you can see the small, ferret-like eyes, the thin pinched nose, only a thought more peaked, the two rows of stiff, wiry little curls, that seem only to require a point to convert them into first-class augers. There, too, is the long, bony neck, the angular form, the wide, smiling mouth, snuff-be-sprinkled nose and pointed chin, the long, parchment-like hand and arm—in one word, the picture of a sharp, vinegary sarcastic old maid.

But listen; the old maid has thawed out, and is addressing the stalwart guide, who plainly wishes he was somewhere **far away** from her chattering tongue.

"Oh, dear Mr. Tripple, I must thank you a thousand times for your attention last night. I'm sure I don't know but what I'd 'a' froze hard as a stone if it hadn't 'a' been for you."

"Oh Lord!" groaned Hank, in an aside, "she hugged me so I could sca'cely breathe."

"Don't Josie sing sweetly! I do wonder if she did really take advantage of leap-year and pop the question. But I don't think it's any more'n right if she *did*. What's leap-year made for, if not to give us poor women a chance to get married, when the men are so bashful? Now if I wasn't such a young an' giddy girl, perhaps I'd pop to some steady, sober man, who'd take good care of a wife an' family; some one like you, Hankford, a few years older'n me."

"Suckers an' lizards!" the guide gasped, aside, "she's goin' to pop, an' is ole enough to be my great-gran'mother! Lordy, Lordy, now I wish I's out o' hyar!" and he began beckoning furtively for Basil to come to his relief, but without success.

"Yes, Mr. Tripple; I don't think anybody has any right to live single all their lives. That's not what we're made for. S'posing no people was to git married for two hundred years! Why, what'd become o' the world? Goodness knows, I don't. I s'pose you'll get a wife some o' these days, won't you, Mr. Hank?"

"Lordy, Miss Medory, what'd I want to git married fer?" stammered Hank, adding, to himself, "It's a-comin' now; I knowed it when she fust corraled me, the ole witch!"

"Why, my gracious, Mr. Tripple, how you do talk! What does anybody get married for? Wouldn't it be nice, now, to have some dear, loving person to sew buttons on your shirt, an' darn your socks for you?" insinuatingly asked Miss Medora.

"Darn the socks!" muttered Hank, wiping away the drops of cold sweat that dampened his brow.

"Yes, so I said; darn your socks, cook for you, an' meet you at the door at night with a sweet kiss, when you come home all tired an' dirty from work. Oh, wouldn't that be nice—such happiness!" and she gazed up in his face with a loving glance that could not be mistaken.

"Raaly, Miss Medory, I believe I must go out doors. I want—want ter—to cough!" stuttered Hank.

"Law, Hank, cough away; it won't hurt nothing. What's

the matter with you to-night, any way ? you act the same as though you were afraid I'd bite you. You wasn't so bashful the night the Indians had us shut up in the cave. Don't you remember how you—you kissed me then, dear Hankford ?" laying her hand affectionately upon his arm.

"Thunder !" he groaned inwardly, "how I wish somebody 'd come an' take her away. I'll bet a boss ag'in' a p'int o' cider that the ole she-*witch* 'll marry me yet, afore the night is over ! Darn her, *she* did all the kissin' thet night ; I wouldn't kiss her for the worl'."

Just then a young lady came up, Miss Kate Hudgins, and as she was not very well acquainted with the persons present, the love-smitten Medora proceeded to enlighten her, thus offering Hank a slight respite. After a time :

"Oh looky ; there comes the minister. Now he'll marry 'em, and then we'll have supper !"

In the confusion and bustle that now ensued, Kate moved to another part of the house, and Medora was left alone with Hank, to the great disgust of the latter.

"See, Mr. Tripple, they're just standing up, and he's opening his book. Don't it make you feel funny ? I tremble so I can hardly sit still. Oh, hain't it awful ? but then it's all human and all of us must do the same, 'less we to want die old maids and bachelors. Say, Hankford, it's leap-year now, and s'pose some nice young girl 'd ask you to marry her, what'd you say ?"

"Oh Lordy, I don't know !" groaned Hank, his eyes looking like two young moons. "Don't, Miss Medory ; please don't !"

"Don't what, Mr. Tripple ? What do you mean ? Is the man crazy ?" cried Medora.

"Don't—don't *pop*, please don't ! Don't tell me how I love—you, I mean," stammered the bewildered guide.

"Bless you, Hankford, bless you ! How happy those precious words have made me feel ! Hankford, dear Hank, my heart is too full ; let me rest here, my first, my only love," murmured Medora, resting her head upon his bosom.

"What the—ole cats is the matter wi' the woman ? Say, Miss Medory, what's the matter ?"

"Oh, Hank, I'm so glad. I've loved you for so long, and now you say that you love me !"

"Me? I didn't say I loved you!" exclaimed Triplett.

"Mr. Tripple, what do you mean? Now that I've avowed my love for you, are you going to back out? Just try it, that's all, and I'll see if there's any justice for a poor, lone female. Just try it, and see if I don't make you smart for it!" whispered Medora, her long, bony fingers tightly pressing the bewildered guide's arm.

"Don't, Miss Medory. What do you want me to do?"

"You must tell the parson that you want to get married, or I'll—I'll faint in your arms!"

"Oh Lordy, don't; don't, Miss Medory, an' I'll do any thin'."

"Then tell him!"

"I cain't, oh I cain't! Let me go, I'm sick, I want to go home!" moaned the ill-fated guide.

"Tell him then, or I'll faint, and sue you for breach of promise," whispered Medora, threateningly.

"Mr.—Mr. Rog—!" squealed Hank, jumping almost out of his clothes, as the love-lorn damsel's bird-like claws tightly compressed his arm; then breaking down in a prolonged groan as all eyes were turned toward the couple, astonished at this unlooked-for interruption, he sunk into his seat, with the great drops of perspiration rolling down his face.

"My friend, what is the matter? why do you interrupt the ceremony?" gravely inquired the minister.

"I—I didn't, she—I want to git married too!" yelled Triplett, in answer to another pinch, and squirming away from the sharp elbow that almost penetrated his ribs.

"Well, patience, my good sir," quoth Mr. Rogers, smilingly. "There is time enough for all things, and your turn shall come next," and then the bridal ceremony proceeded.

Poor Hank tried in vain to escape from his captor, but her strong arms held him secure, and the regal head bowed itself upon his expansive bosom, in order to hide—her maidenly blushes perhaps.

Tremblingly Hank's terror-stricken eyes watched the ceremony, his pallid lips parted to emit a heartfelt groan at every response; but his heart sunk several degrees below zero as he felt how fully his fears were realized, and how vain it would be to struggle against his dread fate. He knew that it would

be vain to attempt an escape; the long bony arms encircled him too closely for that; and he felt, with a pitiful sigh, that his fate was settled—that Medora had “popped” with fatal effect.

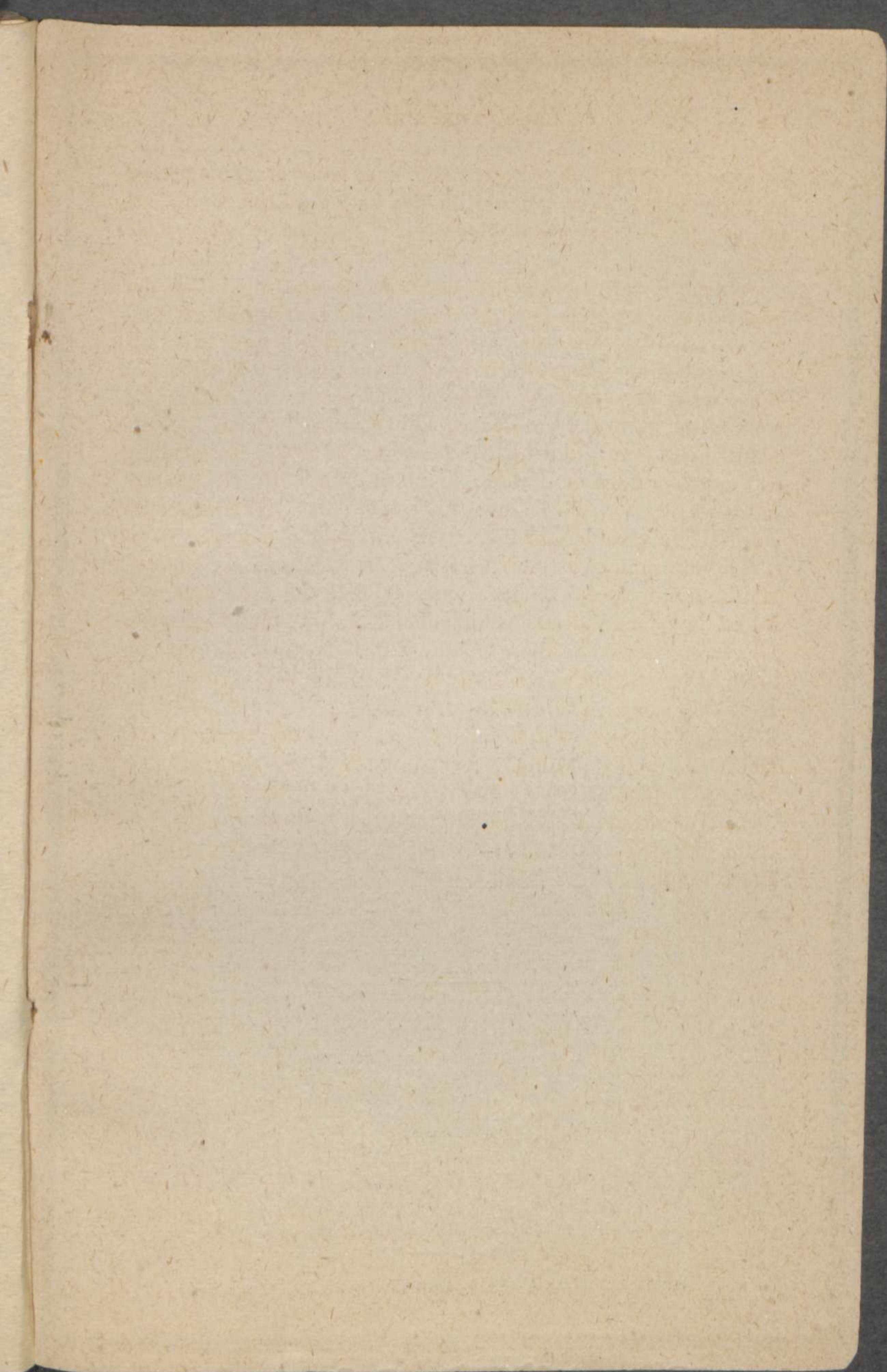
At length the young couple were made one, and after the congratulations were over, the gay party crowded around the newly-betrothed pair, questioning them, and wondering in the same breath how it all came about. Their questions were answered by Medora, and the twain stood up before the minister, ere Hank had recovered from his bewilderment. In the responses he managed pretty well, owing to the promptings of Medora, and if he was a little incoherent in his replies, it was attributed to bashfulness. Then the final words were spoken, and they were pronounced man and wife!

The old maid was married—was an old maid no longer. Hank did not seem to fully comprehend the fatal fact, and stared in open-mouthed astonishment at the merry speeches that were showered upon them. But it worked through his brain at length, for, as the party broke up, he was seen to draw Hezekiah Simpson to one side, and say:

“Look a-hyar, young feller; ye know my hoss, ‘Silver Heels,’ the one ye wanted to buy. Wal, ef ye’ll on’y jist take Medory yander, I’ll give ’im to ye, an’ throw in my rifle to boot.”

But, unfortunately, ’Kiah did not see it in that light, and Hank was led away by his Medory, a forlorn captive to her—sharp tongue and powerful fingers.

THE END.



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